

A Greenway for Ontario: A Cooperative Approach to Protecting Green Space

A vision of:

- communities connected to nature
- rural open space connected to urban green space
- wildlife habitats protected across broad landscapes
- water protected at its source
- Ontarians engaged in promoting and ensuring healthy landscapes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Greenway for Ontario is Ontario Nature's vision for the future of land conservation in Ontario. A Greenway for Ontario will keep Ontario's remaining natural spaces and working lands healthy, vibrant and ecologically sustainable. A Greenway for Ontario will protect species and habitats, while promoting land-use practices that incorporate the needs of nature protection through 'smart' planning. Conservation science shows us that the most effective way to protect biodiversity in a shared landscape of urban, rural, recreational, agricultural, industrial and natural land uses is through systems of protected natural cores linked by corridor areas. An interconnected network of conserved cores and corridors will protect habitat and species while fostering sustainable livelihoods and providing communities and citizens with places to recreate and appreciate nature. This is the promise of **A Greenway for Ontario**.

Ontario Nature is a membership-based not-for-profit conservation organization that protects and restores natural habitats through research, education and conservation. Established in 1931, Ontario Nature was created as a federation to work on behalf of local naturalist clubs in their missions to protect and foster appreciation for natural areas throughout the province. Our early work helped usher in the *Ontario Parks Act* in 1954 (now the *Provincial Parks Act*). Since that time, we have been at the forefront in support of measures to protect Ontario's natural areas, most recently playing a central role in the development of the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act* and Plan and the *Greenbelt Act* and Plan in the Golden Horseshoe.

With **A Greenway for Ontario**, Ontario Nature is continuing its tradition of actively promoting green space protection. The Greenway is our most ambitious project to date, and a logical next step after our recent success in advocating for provincial legislation that values conservation in the Greenbelt area. The **Greenway** – which is similar to yet geographically and strategically much broader than the Greenbelt initiative – will engage community stakeholders and provincial, regional and municipal governments to protect natural cores and corridors throughout southern and eastern Ontario with linkages to protected areas in the north.

Ontario Nature will seek to establish the **Greenway** initially by working at the local level. Citizens, farmers, other landowners, conservation organizations, stewardship groups, municipal governments, government agencies and community groups will play a central role in identifying, protecting and restoring natural core and corridor areas that will make up the **Greenway**. Over the next five years, Ontario Nature will build these partnerships to lay critical groundwork to achieve a province-wide **Greenway for Ontario**.

A GREENWAY FOR ONTARIO: A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO PROTECTING GREEN SPACE

I THE GREENWAY VISION

A satellite view of southern and eastern Ontario reveals a fertile slice of land between Lake Huron and Georgian Bay to the west, and Lakes Erie and Ontario and the St. Lawrence River to the south and east. Much of this area, especially south and east of the Canadian Shield, has been cleared for agriculture or urban development, but some important forested portions remain. A narrow green band along the Niagara Escarpment extends from Niagara Falls to Tobermory, and scattered forest patches cling to the Oak Ridges Moraine and parts of eastern Ontario.

This is the land base for Canada's "economic engine." Already home to over 5.5 million individuals, one hundred thousand more people crowd into the Greater Toronto Area each year, creating extraordinary demands for homes, energy supplies, municipal services, transportation, food and other consumer services. Similar pressures are building around cities such as Ottawa and Barrie and along the entire industrial corridor from Windsor to Kingston. It is a crowded landscape. Urban development and the infrastructure that services it are carving up the remaining natural areas. Forests become woodlots that become green patches that become isolated trees. Other natural habitat types, many of them now rare in Ontario, are imperilled – among them wetlands, savannahs, tallgrass prairies and alvars. Many natural areas have been so fragmented by city and highway expansion that they no longer support the diversity of wild plant and animal species that once lived and thrived here.

But all is not lost. In the sea of development, we still have some "islands of green" and limited natural linkages connecting them. There is still time to achieve conservation in this crowded landscape. Through both the stewardship efforts of organizations and individuals and policy initiatives of the Province and municipalities, some of these natural lands remain intact.

Under the **Greenway for Ontario** vision, Ontario is a global leader in preserving green space and farmlands, and in regional planning for urban and rural communities. An interconnected network of public parks, regional and county forests, nature reserves, privately owned green space and agricultural lands snakes its way across the landscape. Community-based conservation planning has resulted in municipal plans that call for "smart growth" and green space and farmland protection. Land trusts have acquired, through purchase or conservation easements, lands with high conservation value. Towns and cities are compact, vibrant and rich in green spaces that provide opportunities for urbanites to enjoy nature close to home. Public transit systems offer efficient and pleasant means to travel within and between communities. Conservation agencies and organizations, community groups, governments, farmers, other landowners and individuals work cooperatively to protect and connect green spaces between communities to create healthy landscapes. The **Greenway for Ontario** is stronger and more beautiful than the sum of its parts.

While the **Greenway for Ontario** is a landscape conservation vision that applies primarily to municipalities throughout southern and eastern Ontario it can also resonate in and apply to municipalities in the north.

Today, many of the elements of the **Greenway** are already in place – parks and other protected areas, and lands carefully stewarded by farmers, other landowners and conservation organizations have kept many natural cores and corridors intact. There are policies and programs for selected landscapes such as the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine and other lands in the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt, and there are some similar efforts being undertaken by a number of municipalities that have established “greenlands” systems as part of their official plans. Some provincial government initiatives, such as the Natural Spaces Program, also provide tools for helping to conserve green spaces. Missing are a broadly accepted **Greenway** vision and a practical program to engage communities in coordinating these efforts to create an interconnected system of natural core areas and natural corridors. This is the promise of a **Greenway for Ontario**.

The Challenge: Our Changing Landscape

Since World War II, Ontario has experienced a dramatic increase in population and urbanization of the landscape, especially in the southern portion of the province:

- At the start of European settlement in about 1800, over 90 percent of southern Ontario was covered by forest. Eighty percent of the upland woodlands south and east of the Canadian Shield has been lost since the 19th century.
- Almost no old growth forest is remaining. Less than 0.07 percent of the land base is left in these vital habitats.
- Over 75 percent of pre-settlement wetlands have been lost due to draining, filling or other habitat alteration for a number of human uses. Eighty to 90 percent of Canada’s urban wetlands have been destroyed.
- For the Greater Golden Horseshoe area (the area from Midland in the north, to Fort Erie in the south, Waterloo in the west and Peterborough in the east), the population will grow from 7.4 million in 2000 to 10.5 million in 2031, an increase of 43 percent;¹
- In the same region over the same 30-year time period, unless current growth management practices change, 1070 square kilometres of land will be urbanized ¹. This is almost double the current area of the amalgamated City of Toronto and represents a 45 percent increase in urbanized land in the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
- Each year, 5,800 premature deaths can be attributed to poor air quality in the province². This deterioration in air quality can be largely attributed to motor vehicle use necessitated by our sprawling urban land use patterns. At the same time, we are destroying the very features of our landscape that can help mitigate this pollution as we sprawl out into the countryside – our forests, wetlands, farmlands, and other natural areas.

Ongoing threats to the biodiversity of Ontario’s southern landscape, the most ecologically imperiled region in Canada, include:

- habitat loss and fragmentation, notably from urban sprawl and associated infrastructure (highways, utility corridors, etc.);

¹ Neptis Foundation, 2000

² Ontario Medical Association, 2005.

- exotic invasive species;
- elevated predation on wildlife from domestic and feral animals;
- a vast array of chemical pollutants – the legacy of unsustainable industrial activity – many of which persist in the environment and bio-accumulate; and
- climate change, the future effects of which are reliably predicted to be massive and insidious.

The Greenway Opportunity

The southern and eastern parts of Ontario have undergone some of the most significant habitat alteration and loss in Canada. The grasslands, forests, savannahs, ravines, moraines, woodlands and wetlands that once constituted a mosaic of rich and diverse habitats are now remnants of their former expanses. Ontario is home to some of the rarest species and habitats in the country.

Despite the rate and extent of natural habitat loss, and even though the region is home to almost 40 percent of Canada's population, remarkable opportunities still exist to:

- conserve habitats and linkages for wildlife
- protect sources of drinking water
- maintain carbon dioxide-absorbing forests
- provide parks and natural corridors for recreation and nature appreciation
- preserve farmlands
- support ecologically sustainable practices on agricultural and other working lands, and
- demonstrate that nature has a valuable place in a landscape dominated by dense human habitation

The **Greenway for Ontario** is the best way to bring together opportunities for protection of green space – for the benefit of both nature and people, now and into the future.

What is a Greenway?

A greenway is a network of natural areas, made up of core lands of conservation value connected by corridors that allow passage of wild species between them. A variety of land uses can occur within greenways, including agriculture and some sustainable resource uses, provided that they maintain their quality as wildlife corridors. The purpose of greenways is both to create the conditions that ensure the survival of species populations and their habitats, and, on public lands or where permission is given on private lands, to provide opportunities for people to experience and enjoy nature. Typically greenways are implemented within and between urban settlements and they often follow linear features such as river valleys.

The Greenway and the Greenbelt

Over the past 30 years, successive Ontario governments have put in place some bold, innovative, landscape-level conservation plans that cross municipal boundaries. First was the Niagara Escarpment Plan, originally conceived in the late 1960s and the 1970s and ultimately approved in 1985. It protects the forest-covered ridge extending 725 kilometres from Niagara Falls to Tobermory, encompassing 183,000 hectares. Second was the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, with initial work begun in the early 1990s leading to the Plan approved in 2002. It covers a 160-kilometre-long corridor spanning 190,000 hectares across the top of the Greater Toronto Area and east almost to the Trent River. The Greenbelt Plan, approved in 2005, brings together the existing plans for the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine as “anchors” and an additional 400,000 hectares of new Protected Countryside in the Golden Horseshoe, in order to rein in urban sprawl and save farmlands and natural areas.

The Greenbelt provides a valuable building block for the geographically much broader Greenway. There is much to learn and possibly borrow from the policies of the three landscape-level land use plans in the Greenbelt. But the **Greenway for Ontario** is a considerably broader vision than the Greenbelt, both in its geographic scope and in the strategies for its implementation.

Government programs in the Greenbelt are implemented primarily through land use plans, with some support for voluntary, incentive-based land stewardship activities to help keep the landscape green. The strategy for implementing the **Greenway for Ontario** initially is focused on community-based, community-driven landscape greening. It emphasizes voluntary tools such as incentives (e.g., property tax reduction programs, and Environmental Farm Plans), conservation easements, land securement by land trusts and some form of recognition for the ecological “goods and services” provided by owners of rural green spaces. As the Greenway evolves, a full range of implementation options, including provincial legislation, policy direction and planning, may be considered.

The Benefits of a Greenway for Ontario

The benefits to nature of a system of natural cores and corridors have been known for some time. Conservation scientists such as Michael Soulé and Reed Noss have established the critical role of core habitats of sufficient size and linkages between them for species survival and healthy ecosystems.

Wild species can no better live in isolation from others of their kind than can humans. Quite simply, biodiversity depends on interconnected natural areas because animals need to interact with each other or they need to move between habitats to respond to seasonal changes in food supplies or climate. Past efforts to protect only some islands of green in isolated parks will not work for the future – they are too small to conserve viable populations of most wild species and they do little to ensure that species can travel across broad landscapes. Area-sensitive species and forest-interior species are particularly at risk. We need to protect remaining rare habitats and engage in significant habitat restoration to enlarge core areas and establish habitat connections. Sufficient

habitat supply – amount, type and spatial configuration – is critical to maintaining viable populations of the species that ought to be found in Ontario's landscapes. We cannot assume that habitat for wild species is plentiful somewhere else if we destroy it here in Ontario.

In the past decade, as the pressures of population growth and urban sprawl have increased, there has been a growing appreciation of the other benefits of natural areas protection, including:

- water source protection
- air quality enhancement
- spiritual, recreational, economic and healthy community benefits
- human health benefits
- coordination and rationalization of municipal “greenlands” policies
- moderation of climate change and assistance in species adaptation to climate change.

The **Greenway for Ontario** can be an excellent adaptation strategy to offset the impacts of climate change (global warming). An interconnected system of natural habitat cores and corridors can provide movement opportunities for wildlife whose ranges will be increasingly threatened by climate change. The Greenway will help species to find potentially suitable habitats in rapidly changing climatic regimes. Habitat protection and restoration efforts will not only help to sequester carbon but will also serve as an important adaptation strategy to help species cope with climate change and travel to more favourable habitats. Biological corridors – especially those with a north-south orientation – may be the best way to help species manage the realities of global warming.

Healthy ecosystems, with their natural diversity of life, provide the ecosystem services – clean air, clean water and natural habitats – to sustain healthy people and provide the renewable resources to sustain a healthy economy. Indeed, the Greenway vision is embedded in an ecosystem approach for a healthy and sustainable future.

The **Greenway for Ontario** is critical to meeting Ontario's provincial, national and international responsibilities for biodiversity conservation. At the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Canada signed the *Convention on Biological Diversity*. In 1995, to implement the Convention, Ottawa developed the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy, which was adopted by federal, provincial and territorial ministers on behalf of their respective governments. The principles of the federal strategy guide Ontario's efforts, which are being implemented through *Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy*, adopted in 2005. These international, national and provincial commitments require Ontario to act proactively to preserve biodiversity within the province, especially those species which are unique to Ontario.

For example, the part of the province known as Carolinian Canada is found south of an imaginary line which runs approximately from Grand Bend on Lake Huron to Toronto. It represents the northernmost edge of the deciduous forest region in eastern North America, and is named after the Carolina states. This ecosystem is found nowhere else in Canada and contains a suite of unique species, such as the tulip tree, sycamore, American chestnut, a variety of songbirds, woodpeckers, and many other diverse species. With 40 percent of all the species-at-risk in Canada, conservation in Ontario's Carolinian zone is critically important to meeting Canada's and Ontario's biodiversity commitments.

This part of Ontario also has experienced the most intense human use and occupation of anywhere in the province. Protecting the maximum possible number of interconnected natural habitats in this area is essential to upholding Ontario's biodiversity commitments because it is here that we find the highest biodiversity in all of Canada. Indeed, Ontario arguably cannot meet its biodiversity commitments unless we protect the diversity of the Carolinian zone. The **Greenway for Ontario** provides a rationale and inclusive mechanism for identifying and conserving the habitats essential to ensuring these species will be around for the enjoyment of future generations.

The Greenway can be a storehouse for what has been called "natural capital"³ – natural and ecosystem resources and lands that are assets yielding "environmental goods and services" essential to the sustained health and survival of our population and economy. Converting natural landscapes to other uses can be economically inefficient. When we destroy natural capital (wetlands, woodlands, or waterways), we must find substitutes – which are often more expensive – for the ecological services that natural capital provides. These services include water purification, waste assimilation, cleansing of the atmosphere, carbon storage, mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, flood prevention and prevention of soil erosion. Many studies have shown the significant economic value of these ecological services. The **Greenway for Ontario** provides a mechanism for ensuring continued protection and production of ecological goods services so that expensive substitutes are not necessary.

Why an Ontario Greenway Now?

It is time to make the connection between:

- the existing greenways such the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt, the Lake Ontario waterfront and others, to enhance their value;
- the need for water protection at source and the green spaces that can provide that protection;
- green spaces identified in each municipal official plan, in those of neighbouring municipalities, and linkages among protected green spaces across southern and eastern Ontario;
- farmlands and the contributions they can make to preserving woodlands, wetlands, and other important habitats
- sustainable agricultural practices and the benefits they provide to farmers, such as natural pest control and lower input costs
- the transportation and economic infrastructure that supports our economy, and the "green infrastructure" that protects and supports our quality of life by feeding us, cleaning our air and providing us with safe drinking water;
- the health of our environment and human health and well-being; and
- the dream of a healthy, connected system of natural areas and the practical programs needed to make it happen.

³ Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited Canada, *The Value of Natural Capital in Settled Areas of Canada*, 2004.

It is evident that rapid urban growth in many parts of Ontario is fragmenting remaining natural areas and driving up the price of land. The cost of delay will be considerable. There is much to do to protect water sources, natural areas and species-at-risk, and to provide for green-space recreational opportunities. A comprehensive, coordinated **Greenway for Ontario** will consume fewer human and financial resources than will addressing each issue and community separately. Governments, agencies, landowners and non-governmental organizations recognize these goals, and are willing to work together. There is increased public awareness about the need for smart growth, green space protection, more public transit, better urban design, urban intensification and landscape-level planning in southern Ontario.

Ontario Nature can provide the leadership necessary to launch and promote the **Greenway for Ontario**. What is needed now is government, landowner and community support. The **Greenway for Ontario** initiative will foster that support by bringing people and resources to the table to craft agreed-upon strategies for making the Greenway vision a reality.

What a Greenway for Ontario Looks Like

The final configuration of the **Greenway for Ontario** and the mechanisms for its implementation will vary across the province and will incorporate the interests of a variety of residents, organizations, landowners and decision-makers. The Greenway will build upon and enhance the protection of existing protected public and private lands by providing for buffers around them and corridors between them. These buffers and corridors will consist mostly of rural private lands that include exceptionally important natural features and groundwater recharge and discharge zones. Land use planning will exclude incompatible new uses (such as certain industrial activity, intensive recreation and urban development outside settlement areas), but farming and existing land uses will continue. Special provisions will protect natural features and functions within settlement areas and across the landscape.

Within the natural cores and corridors, habitat protection and restoration will be accomplished over time through incentives for and stewardship by private landowners. Landowners in natural core and corridor areas will qualify for stewardship support and incentives that support Greenway protection. Such measures could include fencing livestock pastures off from streams, buffering streams and water bodies, replanting hedgerows, protecting or creating interior forest, protecting and restoring wetlands, establishing conservation easements, and so on.

While private landowners will continue to own and steward most of the Greenway lands, some Greenway lands are held by conservation organizations, and some are already in public ownership as parks, regional and county forests, conservation areas, rail trails and hazard lands. In exceptional cases, additional lands may be purchased on a willing buyer/willing seller basis, to make connections, buffer or join existing parklands, or provide for low-impact public use.

The **Greenway for Ontario** will be:

- based on sound conservation science;
- respectful of landowner rights and interests;
- subject to planning controls that are in place;
- eligible for incentives for restoration and protection; and,
- established largely on privately owned lands in cooperation with landowners.

Agriculture and the Greenway for Ontario

The vast majority of Ontario's rural landscape is owned and stewarded by farmers. The **Greenway for Ontario** will be "farm friendly." While the Greenway's focus is on protecting and restoring nature, Ontario Nature seeks solutions that also will fulfill society's needs for protected countrysides and viable agricultural production, while contributing to "smart growth" solutions to meet the needs of an expanding population. Our work in fostering greener land use planning and land stewardship will be successful only if we work collaboratively with those who own the land, in particular, farmers. The farm community has expressed its interest in environmental protection through the Environmental Farm Plan program. Many rural natural areas are located on farms, and some farmers are exploring the potential for tangible financial recognition for the environmental goods and services that they provide to society by protecting woodlands, wetlands and streams on their farms. Ontario Nature will seek out opportunities to find common ground with farmers in creating the **Greenway for Ontario**.

Trails and the Greenway for Ontario

The primary objective of the Greenway is protection and stewardship of sensitive and important natural areas and water sources. Most of the lands that will provide the threads to connect the Greenway will be privately owned and stewarded, and consequently the existence of the Greenway will not include any inherent right to public access. However, portions of the Greenway may be located on public lands and, in some cases, footpaths can be located without interfering with sensitive natural features. These paths may also be connected through trail easements, rail trails or voluntary agreements with landowners to provide a network of paths across southern and eastern Ontario. These paths and trails can, in some cases, form part of the corridor/linkage function in the Greenway.

Footpaths will connect communities and will help more people to enjoy the natural beauty of Ontario. The Bruce Trail on the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Trail, the Grand Valley Trail and many others have demonstrated that public footpaths build appreciation of and support for natural areas protection. They are very popular, contribute to community health and healthy landscapes, and benefit local economies. Like natural areas in every municipality, existing trails need some interconnections to make them stronger and more valuable for nature protection.

II THE STRATEGY FOR ESTABLISHING A GREENWAY FOR ONTARIO

Conservation must be planned at a landscape scale – and the landscape is crowded. Achieving the Greenway vision will take many years and the commitment and actions of many agencies, individuals, farmers, other landowners, conservation organizations, municipal governments, communities and residents. Ontario Nature cannot hope or expect to influence all Greenway decisions directly. Rather, we will:

- help develop and deliver the science to ensure the most ecologically valuable areas are considered for conservation;
- be a catalyst by inspiring commitment to the vision, and offering tools to build capacity to support local Greenway planning;
- where we have the capacity, participate directly in land use planning, stewardship and conservation campaigns;
- work in partnership with a diversity of other organizations to promote and achieve the Greenway;
- engage the creativity and support of private landowners, who are the stewards of most of the remaining green spaces in Southern Ontario, including them early in the process and considering their interests at all stages;
- secure the support of regional and county governments, local municipalities and agencies such as the conservation authorities and stewardship councils – all have experience, local knowledge and established relationships with private landowners;
- work cooperatively with all stakeholders for greater community and environmental benefit;
- help influence and shape the Ontario Natural Heritage Strategy to ensure its outcomes help contribute to a vibrant and lasting Greenway; and
- consider the need for provincial legislation, policy and planning direction as one of the many implementation options as the Greenway evolves – either an improved Provincial Policy Statement under the *Planning Act* or even Greenway-specific legislation could be considered.

The determination of goals and standards for the system of natural cores and corridors will involve extensive consultation with regional, county and local governments and will greatly benefit from provincial support, both technical and financial. Implementation of the Greenway will be achieved through provincial regional, county and local governments and private landowners, with the support of conservation authorities and stewardship councils. All municipalities should have their own Greenways, but their location and extent should be determined in a coordinated fashion through collaborations of the Ministry of Natural Resources, upper-tier municipalities (counties and regions), lower-tier municipalities (towns, townships, etc.), conservation authorities, and other ministries and stakeholders working together to ensure meaningful ecological connectivity.

The **Greenway for Ontario** will establish broad basic standards for stewardship of natural cores and corridors across Ontario. Certain areas of particular provincial, regional or local significance may require special protection as determined by local, regional, county or provincial governments.

While the principles and broad aspects of the Greenway must be developed first, some regions of the province will have the necessary data gathered and consultation completed before others. Also, the pressures of development may suggest priorities for implementation. It is likely that the Greenway establishment will proceed at different speeds in different regions.

Within the areas covered by the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan and in addition to these government initiatives are opportunities to work with communities across Ontario. Together, we can promote the greening of Official Plans and ensure that there is community and landowner support for regional conservation efforts that will contribute to the overall Ontario Greenway vision.

Some Initial Steps to the Greenway

- *The Greenbelt and "Places to Grow"*

The implementation of the Ontario government's Greenbelt Plan, starting in 2005, offers a tremendous source of learning for Ontario Nature's Greenway initiative, particularly as municipalities begin to implement the plan. Ontario Nature is fortunate to hold a seat on the Greenbelt Council, which brings together environmental, agricultural and other stakeholders to advise the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on matters related to getting the Greenbelt Plan up and running. The Council will also provide advice on amendments to the Greenbelt Plan, monitor the plan's implementation, and consider emerging issues that Council members bring to the table. It is expected that being close to the action as the Greenbelt Plan rolls out will allow Ontario Nature to tap into the positions and views of municipalities, the farm community and other stakeholders involved in the Greenbelt. In addition, "growing pains" that the Greenbelt Plan might experience will help inform our implementation of the Greenway, including whether provincial planning direction for the Greenway is needed.

In June 2005, the Ontario Legislature passed the *Places to Grow Act*. It provides for the preparation of growth plans for specific portions of the province. Thus far, the government's focus under the Places to Grow initiative has been on the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) – stretching from Niagara west to Kitchener-Waterloo then east through Hamilton, Simcoe County, and the Greater Toronto Area to Peterborough. The final draft of a growth plan for the GGH was released in November 2005, with approval of a final plan expected in spring 2006. Additional 'sub area analyses' proposed under the *Places to Grow Act* provide an opportunity to foster establishment of a **Greenway for Ontario** through natural heritage identification and protection. We need to ensure that all growth plans set aside for protection a robust network of natural cores and corridors.

We will encourage our members, member groups and communities more broadly to become engaged in the Places to Grow process as it unfolds within and beyond the Greater Golden Horseshoe so that we foster creation of the Greenway.

- ***Community Connections***

Ontario Nature is uniquely able to engender community support for the establishment of the **Greenway for Ontario**. Our network of over 140 member groups in communities across the province allows us to tap into local enthusiasm and knowledge to advance the Greenway in communities and at the municipal level of government. With municipal partnerships already established through our *Southern Ontario Woodlands* projects (1999-2005), we are well positioned to continue working with municipalities on creating the Greenway. Now is the time to connect with Ontario's farm community to find common ground on issues of land-use planning, urban expansion and land stewardship.

Ontario Nature can build community and municipal support for the establishment of green space systems in municipal Official Plans. We will do this through public education, such as a media and advertising campaign on the conservation importance of connected cores and corridors, as well as presentations to municipal councils on greening local landscapes through Official Plans. We will host community workshops to introduce Greenway concepts and suggest ways for urban and rural communities to collaborate at the local level. Ontario Nature's regional coordinators will promote and foster voluntary community projects, including community mapping of local natural cores and corridors. We will promote and encourage voluntary, incentive-based methods for natural areas protection that are attractive to landowners, such as property tax reductions, land stewardship assistance and land securement.

It is envisioned that most lands that constitute the Greenway will remain in private ownership and will be implemented through a range of tools including:

- public education and land stewardship information;
- landowner incentives and programs;
- incentives for green space protection planning, including support for identification of the green space systems within each region and county;
- in appropriate circumstances, land securement on a "willing buyer/willing seller" basis; and
- when and if widespread support exists, enabling provincial legislation and policies.

Ontario Nature's work on Greenway implementation will dovetail well with the provincial government's new *Natural Spaces* program headed up by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). *Natural Spaces'* focus is on furthering the establishment of a natural heritage system across southern Ontario through the voluntary engagement of private landowners in conservation activities and incentives.

Support for the Greenway

Support for a system of natural cores and corridors across Ontario is expected to come from both government and non-government sectors, including environmental/conservation non-governmental organizations, many upper- and lower-tier municipalities, conservation authorities, stewardship councils, individual landowners and some farm organizations, and hiking and recreational trail organizations

Conservation organizations have been working closely with government agencies over the past six years to develop a biological map ('bio-map') of Southern Ontario. MNR's Natural Heritage Information Centre and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, in partnership with Ontario Nature, the Carolinian Canada Coalition and others, have worked diligently to create the "Big Picture 2002" map, which profiles a conceptual system of cores and corridors. Similarly, the Carolinian Canada Committee and its partners have developed a "Big Picture" map of cores and corridors for the highly imperilled Carolinian forest region of southwestern Ontario. These 'bio-maps' are based on conservation science principles and contain essential information that will inform the identification of the essential cores and corridors of the **Greenway for Ontario**.

Many upper-tier municipalities and cities have policies to protect natural heritage and water sources. While the terminology may vary, they are commonly referred to as "greenlands" or "green spaces," typically consisting of precisely the kind of natural core and corridor systems that Ontario Nature is advocating for the Greenway. The challenges include coordinating the linkage of these areas across municipal boundaries, maintaining good relations with landowners, and finding the right package of policies, incentives and other measures to preserve those green spaces for the future. Establishment of greenlands systems in official plans and coordination of the greenlands systems of neighbouring municipalities will likely be the most effective way for municipalities to contribute to creating the province-wide Greenway.

At the municipal level, there are difficulties finding the funds and staff resources to consult with communities and implement green spaces programs. Local governments also desire a consistent and defensible approach to landscape protection that will stand up at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). There is considerable potential for upper- and lower-tier municipalities to support the Greenway, provided the approach includes effective participation for municipal governments. There needs to be provision for municipal flexibility in implementing the Greenway locally, such as how and where to create greenlands systems in official plans. Availability of funds for implementation and support and incentives for land stewardship initiatives will enhance the likelihood of municipal engagement.

Conservation authorities are leaders in proposing means of protecting water at source. Their expertise and local knowledge of both natural heritage and water resources are key elements in Greenway establishment. It is expected that conservation authorities will support the Greenway providing a collaborative approach is taken, and additional resources and provincial support are provided.

The Bruce Trail Association and the Oak Ridges Trail Association have been leaders in securing and protecting hiking trails along the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine, respectively. The Appalachian Trail Association has been at the forefront of the development and implementation of the extensive *Commonwealth Connections Greenway System* in Massachusetts. There is good reason to expect that other hiking and non-motorized trail users will be highly supportive of the **Greenway for Ontario**.

There are many other potential supporters for the Greenway, including the general public. According to a 2001 Environics poll of urban Ontario residents, 97 percent think the presence or existence of woodlots and forests found generally throughout southern Ontario is either very important or important. Ontarians have made it clear that they want and need natural areas to be protected and interconnected across the landscape for the future.

III ONTARIO NATURE'S ROLE IN THE GREENWAY FOR ONTARIO

No single organization or agency can establish as bold and large a conservation initiative as the Greenway. However, Ontario Nature will be the driver of the Greenway vision and will take the lead in engendering support from diverse audiences and actors. Some of the ways in which we will foster establishment of the Greenway are outlined above. Overall, we will:

- promote the vision of a **Greenway for Ontario**;
- work with the provincial government to engage its interest in complementing the Places to Grow process with a larger Greenway initiative;
- support and involve ourselves in the Province's *Natural Spaces* program to promote private land stewardship for nature conservation in southern Ontario ;
- create and sustain partnerships with municipalities, conservation authorities, stewardship councils, farm organizations, community groups and interested individuals to foster their involvement in making the Greenway a reality;
- provide resource materials to the public and undertake public outreach initiatives to explain and encourage public support for the Greenway; and
- undertake conservation actions of our own to enhance the Greenway, for example through Ontario Nature's nature reserves land stewardship program, and our conservation volunteer initiative, *Volunteer for Nature*, which engages citizens in restoration and habitat enhancement projects.

IV GREENWAY OUTCOMES

Ontario society and Ontario ecosystems will enjoy the benefits of the **Greenway for Ontario** when the work outlined above to establish and foster the Greenway yields the following results:

- Private landowners access a comprehensive package of tools for conservation and restoration of natural heritage on their properties, including tax incentives, land securement mechanisms (land acquisition, conservation easements, etc.), land stewardship education and assistance, recognition of the ecological goods and services contributed by private land conservation, and natural areas restoration assistance.
- Urban boundary expansions are limited to what is already approved. This smart growth will mean virtually no "greenfield" urban development in the countryside that would jeopardize natural areas and farmland. Instead urban intensification and re-development will accommodate a growing population within existing urban areas creating compact and transit-friendly communities.
- The land use policies of the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan will be harmonized to preserve the strongest policies of each. In addition, the Ontario government will add lands to the Greenbelt where necessary to achieve the Greenway's goals.
- Upcoming provincial source water protection legislation provides protection plans for all watersheds in southern Ontario, thereby also protecting the natural cores and corridors that contain these water sources.
- As one component of Places to Grow implementation, municipalities throughout southern Ontario incorporate interconnected natural cores and corridors as protected green spaces in their Official Plans.
- The *Endangered Species Act* is strengthened and better enforced to improve protection for species at risk and their habitats.
- Informed and engaged citizenry in both rural and urban areas publicly support the **Greenway for Ontario**.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Now is the right time to establish a **Greenway for Ontario** to bring consistency and continuity to the creation of green space networks across the province.

Rather than allowing additional green spaces protection initiatives beyond the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt to evolve separately and in a piecemeal fashion, it will be more efficient and effective to green the landscape under the “umbrella” of the **Greenway for Ontario**.

Ontario’s experience in nature conservation has shown that its people have the foresight, the maturity and the skills to develop a strong consensus and to move to practical implementation of the Greenway. There is strong support for a collaborative approach to this opportunity and provincial leadership is needed to support the process.

The **Greenway for Ontario** is expected to evolve over time. As circumstances change and scientific knowledge increases, preferred mechanisms for implementing the Greenway may change. This is a living document that will be revised as Ontario Nature’s approach to the Greenway evolves.