

Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt

ERO – 019-3196

Introduction

As described in the ERO-019-3196, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is seeking feedback on ways to grow the size and further enhance the quality of the Greenbelt, including ideas for adding, expanding, and further protecting Urban River Valleys. The Joint Working Group – Wesleyville would like the Ministry to be aware of the opportunity to include the rare ravineland / watershed / coastal wetland system at Wesleyville in Northumberland County, immediately to the east of the current greenbelt boundary at the Region of Durham boundary (Fig 1.)



Figure 1: Location of Wesleyville Creek Watershed and Ravines. The Oak Ridges Moraine area is shown in green

About the Joint Working Group – Wesleyville

The JWG-Wesleyville is a volunteer conservation group acting as a subcommittee of the Willow Beach Field Naturalists, Lone Pine Land Trust, and the Northumberland Land Trust. It is dedicated to advancing stewardship and conservation of the Wesleyville Creek Watershed and Valleylands through landowner collaboration and volunteer monitoring.

About the Wesleyville Creek Watershed and Valleylands

The Wesleyville Creek Watershed is located approximately 9 kilometres west of the municipality of Port Hope and extends south of Highway 401 to Lake Ontario. The area is on the western boundary of the municipality of Port Hope and is largely within the property boundaries of Cameco, Hydro One, and Ontario Power Generation.

This unique landscape includes forested ravinelands, grasslands, coldwater streams, and coastal wetlands (see fig 2). It is the largest natural area close to the GTA, and it is representative of the highly biodiverse ravine ecosystems that once characterized the north shore of Lake Ontario, and have now become very rare. What makes Wesleyville unique compared to ravines in the GTA is that this area is still largely natural. However, it is badly in need of protection.

1. **Wesleyville Ravines:** The Wesleyville Ravines are considered the largest intact river valley between Toronto and Port Hope south of Highway 401. The steep sided ravines feature old growth forest and rare plant communities and are the headwaters for the prized cold-water Wesleyville Creek. The ravines are designated as a Provincial Life Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI).
2. **Wesleyville Creek:** Wesleyville Creek is a spring fed, cold-water stream that originates in the ravines and flows south to the coastal marshes and Lake Ontario. It is considered by the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority as pristine and one of finest remaining cold-water streams along the north shore of Lake Ontario. It hosts a genetically pure and native brook trout population (increasingly rare in the southern Ontario landscape) and other fish species.
3. **Wesleyville Coastal Marsh:** The Wesleyville Coastal Marsh complex consists of east and west marshes that drain the tributaries of Wesleyville Creek into Lake Ontario. The marshes include Provincially Significant Wetlands (barrier beach wetlands) as well as a Life Science ANSI. The wetlands complex provide essential fish habitat for Lake Ontario fish species and as habitat for waterfowl, marsh birds, reptiles and amphibians. They are also of increasing value in climate change mitigation and water level regulation and are part of Environment Canada's ongoing Great Lakes Climate Change research.

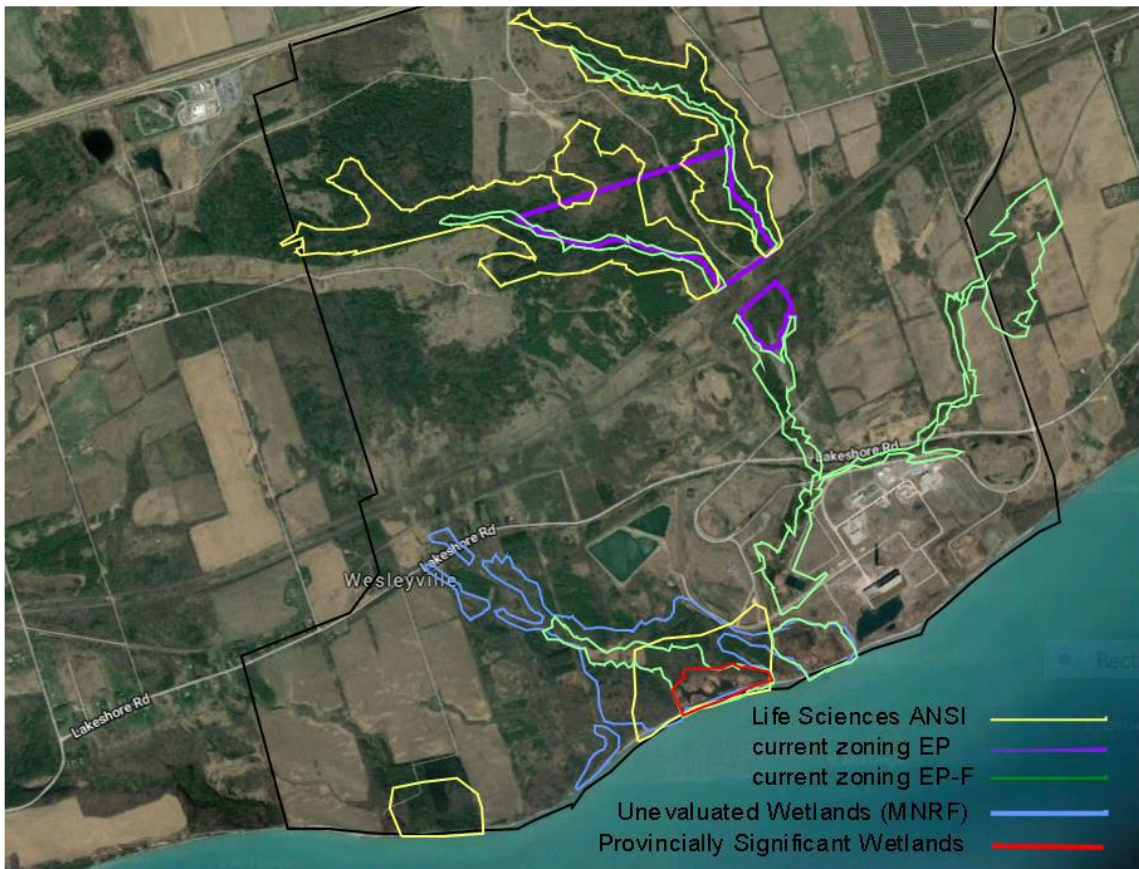


Figure 2 Natural Features of the Wesleyville Creek Watershed and Ravines

Greenbelt Extension Opportunity

The current Greenbelt Plan extends east along the shoreline as far as Graham Creek in the municipality of Clarington, with a northern extension that includes the Rice Lake Plains – Iroquois Plains Natural Area. The extension of the Greenbelt Plan along the shoreline to include the Wesleyville Creek Watershed strongly supports the Principles for Growing the Greenbelt Expansions, specifically principles 3 and 5:

3. *Supports Greenbelt Plan objectives, vision and goals*

Lands to be considered for addition support the Greenbelt Plan’s objectives, vision and goals of providing permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions occurring on this landscape and providing for the inclusion of publicly owned lands in urban river valleys.

5. *Connects physically and/or functionally to the current Greenbelt*

The Greenbelt is meant to be a continuous broad band of permanently protected land. Any expansions shall build upon the systems approach of the Greenbelt Plan and should be directly connected or have a

strong functional connection through the Greenbelt's natural heritage, water resource or agricultural systems to not create unconnected islands of Greenbelt land.

The proximity of the eastern boundary of the Greenbelt along the shoreline to the Wesleyville Creek Watershed is shown in Figure 3 below. There is also great potential for the linkage of key natural areas along the shoreline past Cobourg to link up with the Oak Ridges Moraine.

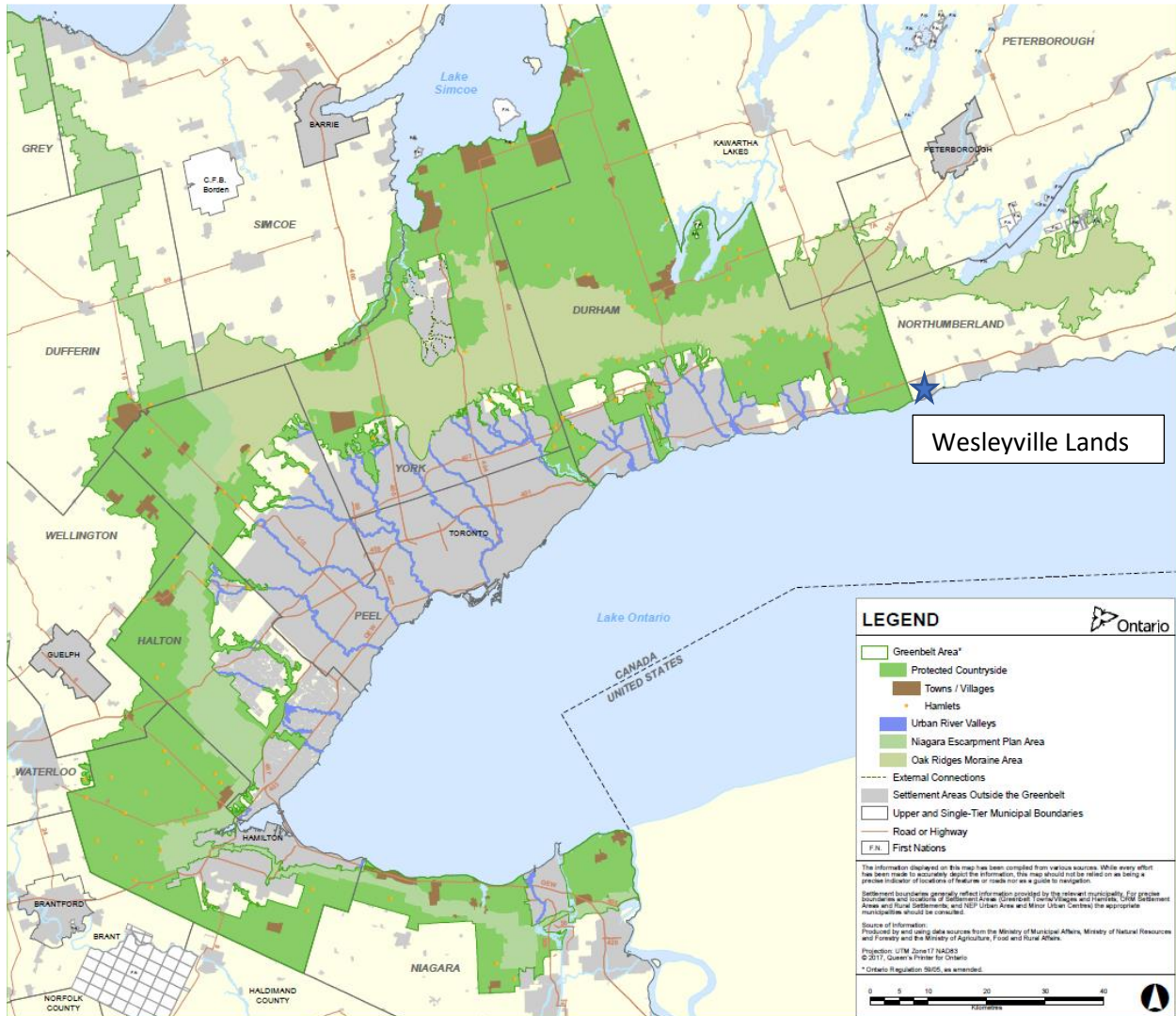


Figure 3: Proximity of Wesleyville Creek Watershed to the eastern edge of the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The lands at Wesleyville are largely owned by Cameco Corporation (as a strategic asset that is surplus to their business needs and could be purchased), Infrastructure Ontario (with easement to Hydro One) and Ontario Power Generation (but surplus to its needs for power generation). They are separated from the Port Granby Nature Reserve (see below) by a strip of land that is largely owned by the municipality of Port Hope.

The inclusion of the Wesleyville lands also takes advantage of two other key initiatives:

Port Granby Nature Reserve (Proposal) The Port Granby Nature Reserve is a proposal to transfer ownership of federally owned lands to local agencies for the ecological restoration and preservation. The easternmost parcels of the 270 hectares are within one property of the OPG owned lands, presenting an ideal opportunity for connectivity along the shoreline (Fig 4) This includes the ecologically significant Cryster Point Bluffs.

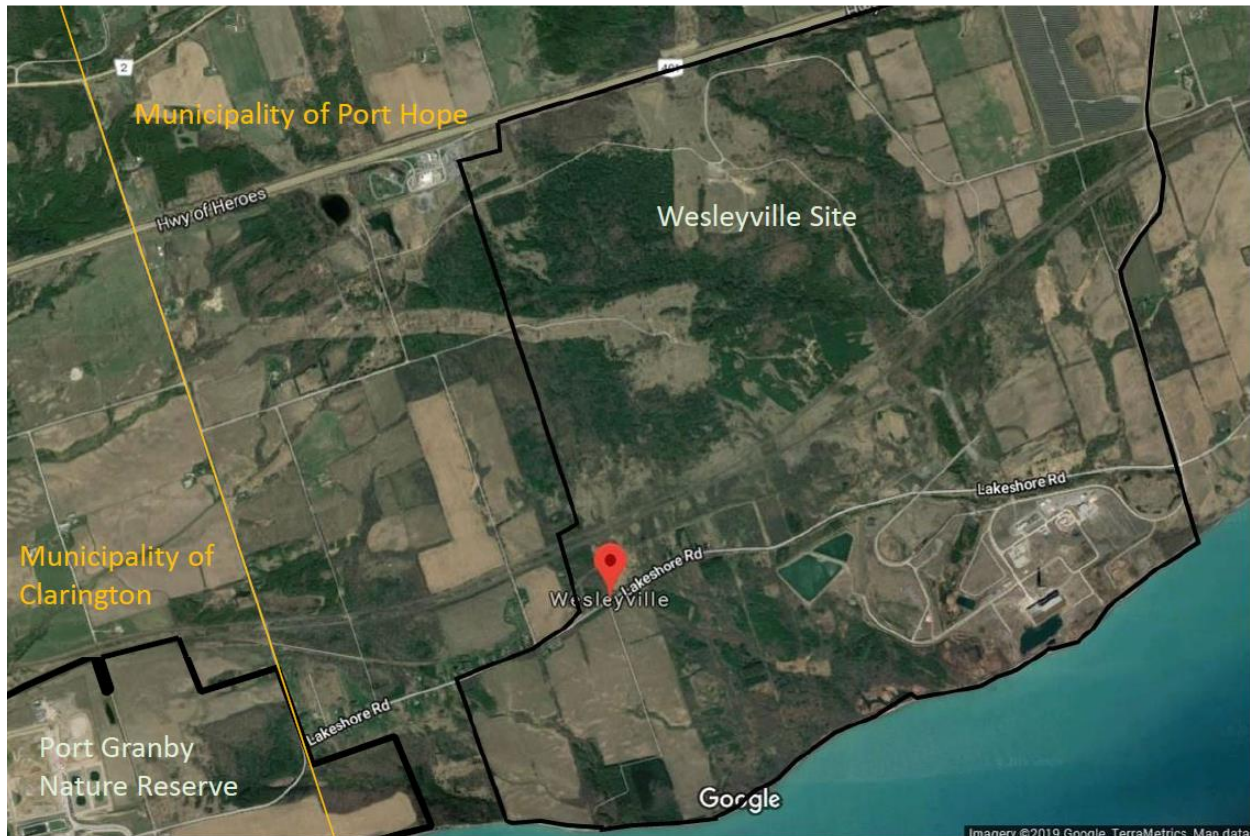


Figure 4: Port Granby Nature Reserve Border and Wesleyville Site Location

Nature Conservancy of Canada – Rice Lake Plains-Iroquois Plain NACP

The NCC's Natural Area Conservation Plan is focused on establishing ecological corridors between key natural features. The Wesleyville Creek Watershed and Ravinelands are a prime opportunity to advance future ecological linkage between the Rice Lake Plains and the Lake Ontario Shoreline. Together with the Port Granby Nature Reserve proposal to the west, this aligns with Schedule 2 of the proposed Greenbelt Expansion and the existing Greenbelt boundaries (Figure 3).

Summary

The Greenbelt Expansion proposal should consider the inclusion of key ecological features east of the current boundary along the shoreline of Lake Ontario. The Wesleyville Watershed and Ravinelands provide an excellent opportunity, and are very much in need of protection, and builds on other initiatives such as the NCC's Natural Areas Conservation Plan for the Rice Lake Plains Lake Iroquois Plains and the proposed Port Granby Nature Reserve.

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