

COMMENTS REGARDING THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE GREENBELT PLAN AND BOUNDARY REGULATION AND THE OAK RIDGES MORAINÉ CONSERVATION PLAN: ERO NUMBER 019-6216; ERO NUMBER 019-6217; ERO NUMBER 019-6218

I am deeply troubled and outraged by the proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan, Boundary Regulation and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan set out in ERO 19-6216, ERO 019-6217 and ERO 019-6218. They will do irreparable harm to Ontario and its inhabitants.

The Greenbelt is truly a treasure. It protects Ontario farmlands, forests, wetlands, wildlife, climate, sensitive habitats, and species, including human beings. The Greenbelt is part of our cultural identity and heritage. It reflects our values as Ontarians and Canadians to protect what is sacred to us - our unique environment, our air, our water, our agriculture, our flora and fauna. Indeed, it protects our well-being.

The Oak Ridges Moraine is also truly a treasure and important for multiple essential environmental reasons, including as a source of irreplaceable headwaters.

The proposed amendments, however, are a multi-pronged assault on the Greenbelt we hold dear.

The proposal to remove 7,400 acres from the protected land of the Greenbelt needs to be withdrawn.

The Greenbelt needs to be expanded, not diminished. The effects of climate change, rising global and local food insecurity, loss of biodiversity, shrinking forests and habitat are realities that must be addressed and helped, not exacerbated. These proposals which would take 15 protected areas out of the Greenbelt, removing 7,400 acres of critically important land are going in the completely wrong direction and are unacceptable at every level.

Furthermore, the “offsetting” proposed in these amendments is ill conceived and scientifically unsound. It is not possible to sacrifice land and destroy habitat in one area and claim net zero by adding some lands in a different location. This is about ecosystems and natural resources and all the complex biological, ecological, hydrological, and climate interactions therein. The lands in the 15 areas are not replaceable. Simple addition and subtraction do not apply here – the “offsetting” proposed is scientifically unsupportable.

Taking these important lands out of the Greenbelt for more housing developments creates more urban sprawl that benefits developers and their associates but hurts the people of Ontario and our environment and climate. Sprawl is resource intensive, increases transportation GHG emissions, and requires servicing that depletes municipal tax coffers taking away from other services that make our communities liveable such as green spaces and parks.

The Greenbelt is meant to be continuous - not a patchwork of what’s left over after uninformed and rushed decisions. The integrity of the Greenbelt must be kept for all of us, for biodiversity, for wildlife migration, for the survival of ecosystems, habitats, all species, and for our own food security. The science is clear - habitat fragmentation has complex and devastating consequences.

I urge the Ministry to preserve the integrity of the Greenbelt and not remove the proposed 7,400 acres from it.

At a time when the planet is in a climate crisis, when food security concerns are mounting, when we are losing forests, wetlands and species, the proposed amendments are tone deaf on these existential matters.

They take Ontario in a completely wrong and dangerous direction. They would cause irreparable harm.

Please carefully consider the comments I have made above and please consider the informed comments of the many citizens across this province who care deeply about preserving the Greenbelt. Please listen to the Indigenous leaders and to Regions and Municipalities and Conservation Authorities, to environmental organizations and NGOs and other people who are knowledgeable about the Greenbelt.