

Environmental groups pleased with Province's action

Reaction continues to come in to the Province's announcement last week of draft amendments to the plans that protect the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine, and Niagara Escarpment, and guide growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).

These amendments are seen as a promising move toward building ecological resiliency and healthy communities in an area under tremendous pressure from sprawling urban development, according to a release from Ontario Nature. It added bold leadership is now needed from the Province to quickly and decisively act on these good intentions.

In the face of climate change and a rapidly growing population, the government must defend water, nature and communities in the GGH so it remains ecologically viable and a great place to live.

"We commend the Province for taking immediate steps towards growing our Greenbelt into 21 urban river valleys, their coastal wetlands and select water sources like Lake Gibson," EcoSpark Executive Director Joyce Chau said. "To truly protect the region's water, we are expecting swift action to ensure a bluebelt of vulnerable water supplies in the GGH, like the Oro Moraine, just north of Barrie, are added to the Greenbelt."

Earthroots, EcoSpark, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition and Ontario Nature have been leading voices for bluebelt and natural areas protection in the GGH. The partnership is calling for stronger protection of the region's natural areas that, among other ecological services, support wildlife and buffer communities from the impacts of climate change.

"We're pleased that the Province has stepped up to the plate and is committed to protect and map the region's natural heritage system," commented Ontario Nature Executive Director Caroline Schultz. "This is our insurance policy to enhance community resilience to extreme weather and other impacts of climate change."

The government must contain urban sprawl and direct infrastructure to existing built-up areas to protect natural areas and headwaters.

"Increases in density and intensification targets, as announced by the Province, are important steps to curb ever expanding urban sprawl," observed Debbe Crandall, director of policy for STORM. "Our worry is that the needs of rural communities on the Moraine and Greenbelt are getting lost in the mix. We are asking that this review do more than just tweak a few rules; what's needed is a comprehensive re-think on how to spark innovation to achieve multiple goals of ecological and social system health and viability of our rural countryside."

"The Province's draft amendments move us in the right direction," Josh Garfinkel, director of Southern Ontario campaigns for Earthroots, said. "We will be pushing the Province for strong implementation of these plans, with a need for added monitoring and enhancement of our natural areas."