

Province seeking public input to protect water resources

Ontario is taking action to protect important water resources in the Greater Golden Horseshoe by launching a public consultation on expanding the Province's Greenbelt.

The Province is considering expanding the Greenbelt to include areas in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, an area that is experiencing significant growth and is under pressure from urban development.

The public, municipalities, conservation authorities, stakeholders and Indigenous communities and organizations are invited to provide input on a study area for potential Greenbelt expansion. The consultation comprises seven areas most in need of protection, including moraines, cold water streams and wetlands in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This area also includes valuable water resources that communities rely on for their water supply.

Comments may be submitted online, through the Environmental Registry or at an open house in January-February 2018.

The hydrological systems under consideration provide high-quality drinking water, manage wastewater and stormwater, sustain plants and animals, and support climate change mitigation, including reducing flood risks. They also provide a competitive advantage for industries, such as agriculture and the agri-food sectors.

The recent review of four land use plans for the Greater Golden Horseshoe highlighted the importance of protecting water resources.

The Advisory Panel for the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review recommended that the Province lead a process to grow Ontario's Greenbelt to protect areas of ecological and hydrological significance where urbanization should not occur.

Ontario's Greenbelt permanently protects roughly 810,000 hectares of green space, farmland, vibrant communities, forests, wetlands and watersheds. Approximately 10,000 hectares were added to the Greenbelt in 2017, including 21 new urban river valleys and associated coastal wetland areas that connect to Lake Ontario.

"Our lakes, rivers and wetlands are essential to the high quality of life enjoyed by people living in the Greater Golden Horseshoe's outer ring today and in the future," Municipal Affairs Minister Bill Mauro said. "We all have an important role to play in preserving these vital water resources. I look forward to hearing your views on the proposed protected areas."

"Water is critical to the health and prosperity of the Greater Golden Horseshoe and is under increasing pressure from growth," Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation CEO Edward McDonnell added. "We are very pleased the government is taking this important step to grow the Greenbelt in order to protect the water systems we all depend on. Ontario's Greenbelt is the solution for fresh air, clean water, healthy local food, active outdoor recreation and a thriving economy."

"I commend the government for taking action to protect these important water systems that are facing increasing stress from urban expansion," former Toronto mayor David Crombie, who chaired the Advisory Panel for the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review, commented. "I look forward to permanent protection for these critical ecological and hydrological areas so we may continue to enjoy the many important services they provide."