

Appendix J: Niagara Escarpment Commission Staff Consultation

- Natural Environment Work Program – Phase 4: Identification and Evaluation of Options – Presentation to Niagara Escarpment Commission Staff (September 16, 2020)
- Information Report - Final Regional Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, prepared by Niagara Escarpment Commission (March 22, 2018)



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OFFICIAL PLAN

Niagara Region

Natural Environment Work Program – Phase 4: Identification and Evaluation of Options

Presentation to Niagara Escarpment Commission Staff

September 16, 2020



Project Overview – Natural Environment

Project Phase	Activities
1	Project Initiation and Procurement
2	Background Study and Discussion Papers for Mapping and Watershed Planning Priority Areas
3	1 st Point of Engagement: Inform on Background Study
4	Develop and Evaluate Options for Natural System(s)
5	2 nd Point of Engagement: Consultation on Options for the Natural System(s)
6	Develop Regional Natural System(s)
7	Develop OP Policies & Finalize Mapping
8	3 rd Point of Engagement: Draft OP Policies and Schedules
9	Other Implementation Tools

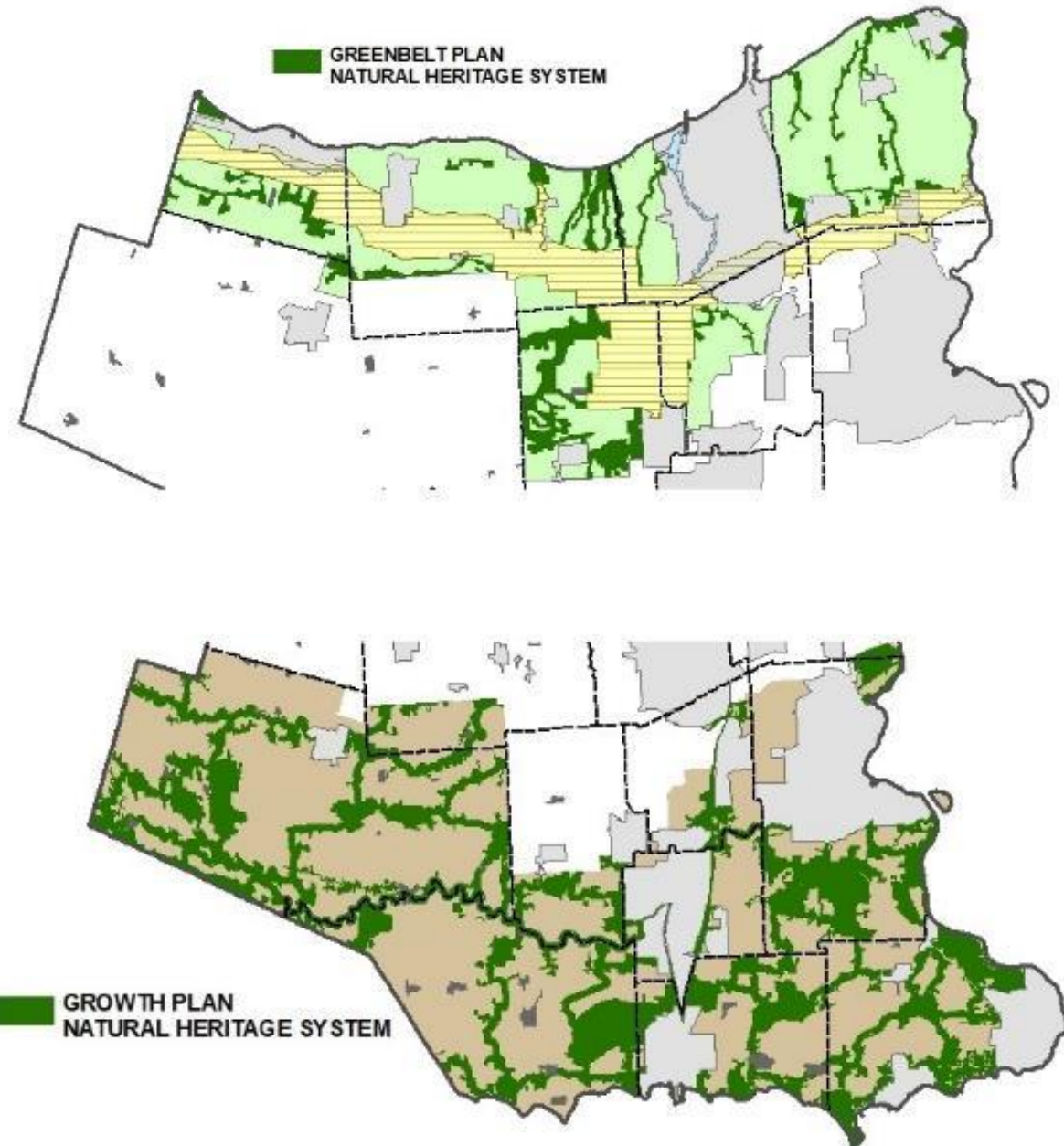
Overview of Phase 4

- Incremental step between the background reports and the mapping and policy development process
- Goal is to establish the overall direction for the natural heritage system (NHS) and water resource system (WRS)
- Based on concepts for the natural systems only. Mapping, criteria, and policies were developed to a level-of-detail that was required to support the evaluation and engagement process only
- Detailed and region-wide mapping to be completed in subsequent phases of the work program



Provincial Direction – Natural Environment

- The **Greenbelt Plan** and **Growth Plan NHSs** have been identified by the Province and are to be implemented by municipalities
- The Growth Plan and PPS also requires that a water resource system be identified and protected.
- The PPS identifies the types of natural features, areas, functions, that must be protected through Official Plan policies



Policy Direction – Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System



- In addition to preparing a map of the NHS, the Province has also mapped the agricultural system
- Within the agricultural system, the PPS and Growth Plan both require that Prime Agricultural Areas be designated in Official Plans
- In contrast, the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan requires NHS to be shown as overlay – to recognize the primacy of agriculture



Policy Direction – Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System

- Policies will not limit the ability of agricultural uses to continue (PPS 2.1.9)
- Greenbelt and Growth Plan NHS policies both provide a wide range of exemptions for new agricultural and agricultural-related buildings and structures
- The requirement for a natural buffer is exempt where lands will continue to be used for agricultural purposes



Policy Direction – Water Resource System (WRS)

- The Province has not prepared a map showing a WRS – however, the Growth Plan requires that a WRS be identified
- While some components of a WRS can be identified (such as wetlands and stream corridors), other components can only be identified through future study



“Watershed planning or equivalent will inform ...the identification of water resource systems.” (Growth Plan, 4.2.1.3a)



Development of Options

- Range of considerations were reflected in the development of options including:
 - Impacts on agricultural community and rural development
 - Provincial requirements to accommodate growth and plan for complete communities in settlement areas
 - Best practices and recent issues and trends in natural environment planning including climate change & invasive species
 - The range of input received through the 1st point of engagement
 - The range of local needs and priorities across Niagara
- All of the options identified:
 - Conform with provincial requirements
 - Represent an increase as compared to the existing system and policies in Niagara









Natural Heritage System Options

- Option 1 - “Minimum Standards – Overlay”
 - Implements minimum standards of PPS and provincial plans
 - Relies on the provincial NHSs to fulfil the requirements for a ‘system-based’ approach
 - Key features required by provincial plans would be mapped, including significant features identified by the PPS. outside of the Provincial NHSs
 - The NHS including individual features would be shown as an overlay in the Official Plan schedules
- Option 2 - “Minimum Standards – Designation”
 - Same as Option 1 but the key/significant features would be designated as a mutually exclusive land use on the Official Plan schedules
- Option 3 – “Going Beyond Minimum Standards”
 - Builds upon Option 1 and 2 by providing three scenarios that exceed minimum provincial standards, and includes an increasing range of additional components, regional linkages, and buffers.



Conceptual Natural Heritage System Settlement Area Option 1 and 2

Legend

-  Settlement Area
- Required Components**
-  Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
-  Vegetation Protection Zones
-  Significant Woodlands
-  Provincially Significant Wetland
-  Watercourses

These maps are conceptual and for illustration purposes. These maps were prepared to demonstrate the differences between the various NHS options and are not intended to depict specific areas in Niagara Region.



Project Number
20-1149

Date:
2020-09-09



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north-south
ENVIRONMENTAL



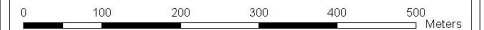
Conceptual Natural Heritage System Outside Settlement Area Option 1 and 2

Legend

Required Components

-  Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
-  Vegetation Protection Zones
-  Significant Woodlands
-  Provincially Significant Wetlands
-  Watercourses

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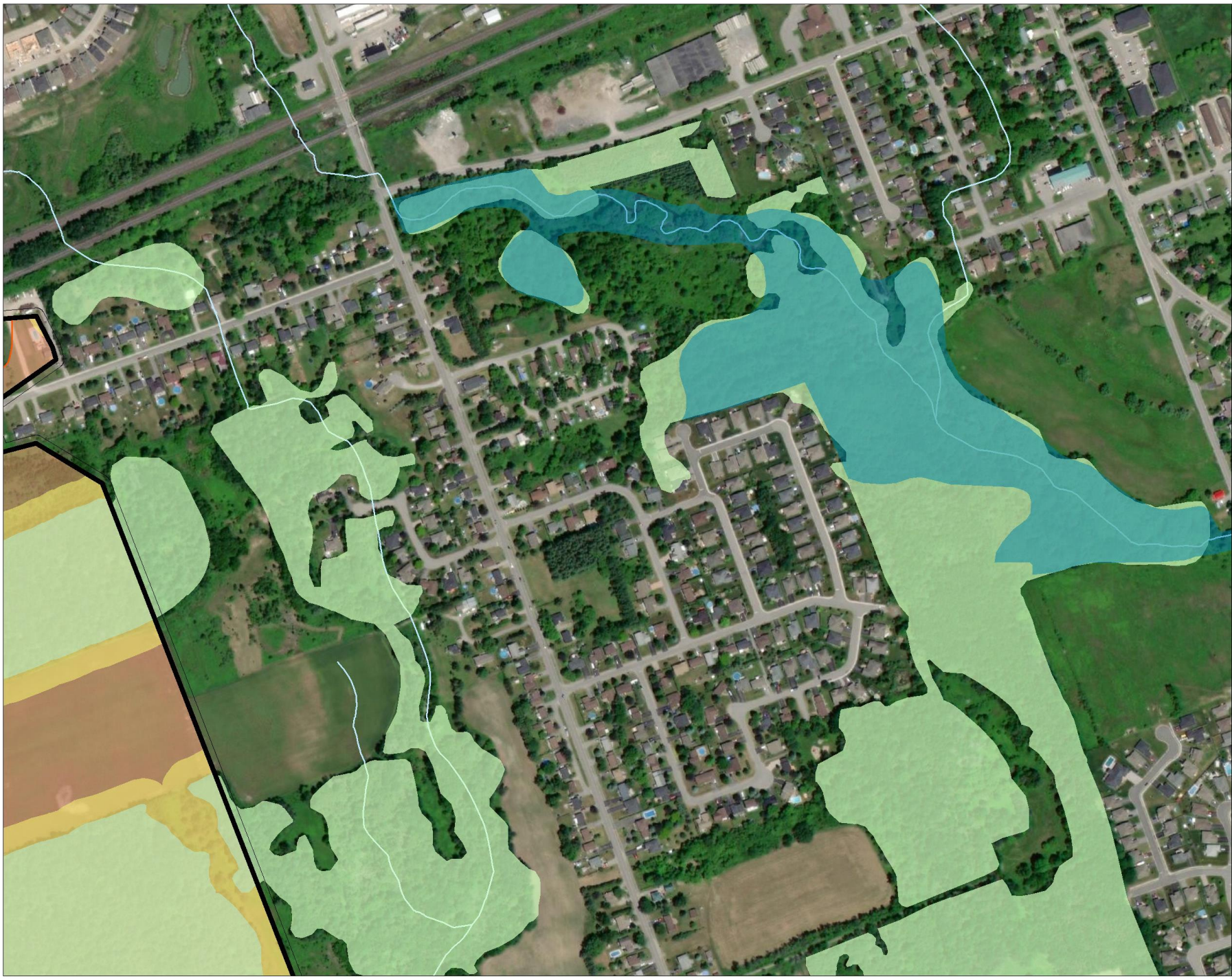
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Comparison of Option 3A, 3B, & 3C

	N.H.S. 3A	N.H.S. 3B	N.H.S. 3C
Component Features and Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Natural Heritage Features within the N.E.P. • Other Key Natural Features and Areas outside of provincial N.H.S.s, but only outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Natural Heritage Features within the N.E.P. as per Option 3A • Other Key Natural Features and Areas outside of provincial N.H.S.s both outside and in settlement areas • Supporting Features and Areas outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Natural Heritage Features within the N.E.P. as per Options 3A and 3B • Other Key Natural Features and Areas outside of provincial N.H.S.s both outside and in settlement areas as per Option 3B • Supporting Features and Areas in all of the Region, including both outside and within settlement areas
Connecting the System (linkages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Linkages only between Key Natural Features and Areas outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large and Medium Linkages between Key Natural Features and Areas outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, Medium and Small Linkages between Key Natural Features and Areas outside of settlement areas • Small Linkages between Key Natural Features and Areas in settlement areas where the potential linkage area is in a natural state
Buffers/ Vegetation Protection Zones (to Key Natural Features and Areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested policy minimums outside of provincial N.H.S.s and outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested policy minimums outside of provincial N.H.S.s, both inside and outside of settlement areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory buffers outside of settlement areas (that can be reduced through study) with suggested policy minimums inside settlement areas



Conceptual Natural Heritage System Settlement Area Option 3A

Legend

-  Settlement Area
- Required Components**
-  Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
-  Vegetation Protection Zones
-  Significant Woodlands
-  Provincially Significant Wetland
-  Watercourses

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Conceptual Natural Heritage System Outside Settlement Area Option 3A



Legend

Required Components

- Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
- Vegetation Protection Zones
- Significant Woodlands
- Provincially Significant Wetlands
- Watercourses

Optional Components

Other Key Features

- Wetlands (non-Provincially Significant)

Linkages

- Large Linkage (400m)
- Mandatory Buffers

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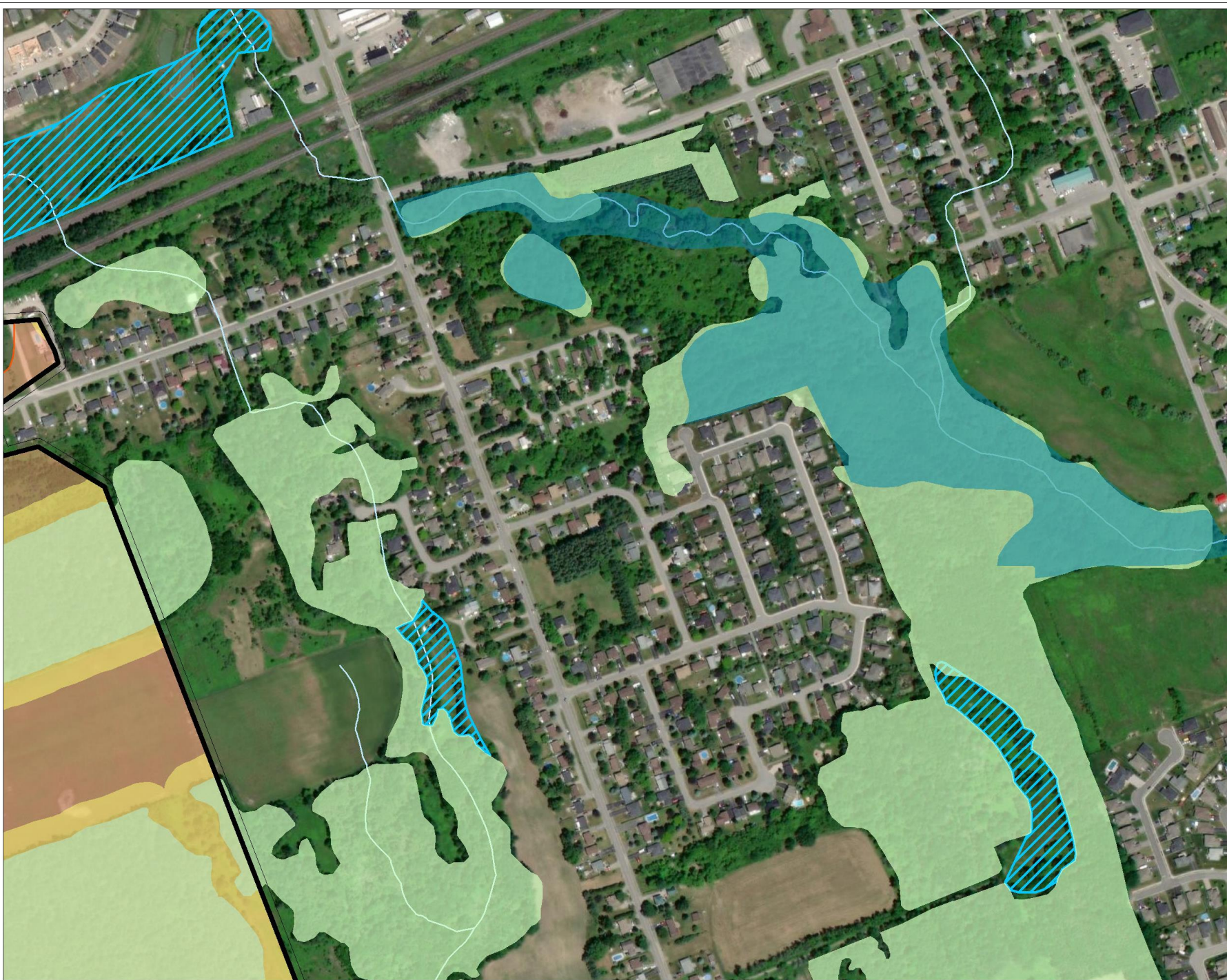
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Conceptual Natural Heritage System Settlement Area Option 3B

- Legend**
- Settlement Area
 - Required Components**
 - Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
 - Vegetation Protection Zones
 - Significant Woodlands
 - Provincially Significant Wetland
 - Watercourses
 - Optional Components**
 - Other Key Features**
 - Wetland (non-Provincially Significant)

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Conceptual Natural Heritage System Outside Settlement Area Option 3B



Legend

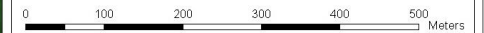
Required Components

- Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
- Vegetation Protection Zones
- Significant Woodlands
- Provincially Significant Wetlands
- Watercourses

Optional Components

- Other Key Features
- Wetlands (non-Provincially Significant)
- Supporting Features and Areas
- Enhancement Areas
 - Other Woodlands
- Linkages
- Large Linkage (400m)
 - Medium Linkage (200m)
 - Mandatory Buffers

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Conceptual Natural Heritage System Settlement Area Option 3C

Legend

Settlement Area

Required Components

Growth Plan Natural Heritage System

Vegetation Protection Zones

Significant Woodlands

Provincially Significant Wetland

Watercourses

Optional Components

Other Key Features

Wetlands (non-Provincially Significant)

Supporting Features and Areas

Other Woodlands

Enhancement Areas

Linkages

Small Linkage (100m)

Minimum Buffers

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Conceptual Natural Heritage System: Outside Settlement Area Option 3C



Legend

Required Components

- Growth Plan Natural Heritage System
- Vegetation Protection Zones
- Significant Woodlands
- Provincially Significant Wetlands
- Watercourses

Optional Components

Other Key Features

- Wetlands (non-Provincially Significant)

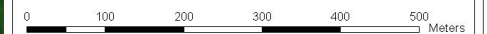
Supporting Features and Areas

- Enhancement Areas
- Other Woodlands

Linkages

- Large Linkage (400m)
- Medium Linkage (200m)
- Small Linkage (100m)
- Minimum Buffers

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NHS Options Summary – NEP Area

- Options 1 & 2 - Minimum Standards Options
 - Have interpreted that the minimum provincial standard does not require the Region Official Plan to identify a NHS within the NEP area
- Option 3 (A, B, & C) - Going Beyond Minimum Standards
 - With these options key natural heritage features would be identified by in the NEP area by the Regional Official Plan











Water Resource System Options

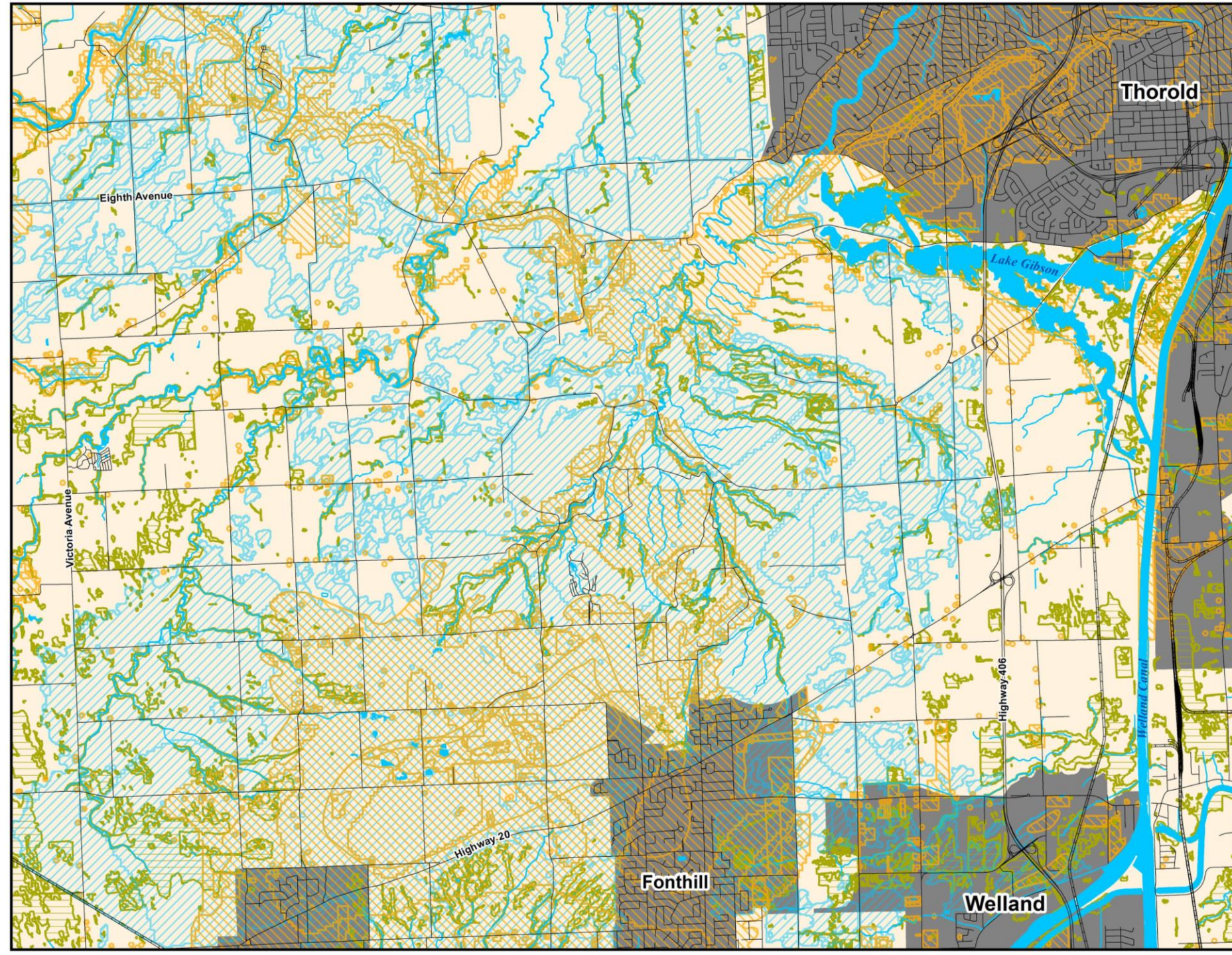
- “Informed by watershed planning or equivalent”
 - ‘Niagara Watershed Plan’ project has been initiated by the Region
- Option 1 - “Minimum Standards – Overlay”
 - Implements minimum standards of PPS, Growth Plan, and Greenbelt Plan
- Option 2 - “Going Beyond Minimum Standards”
 - Same as Option 1 but identified additional/optional components:
 - Option 2A – additional/optional features outside of settlement areas only
 - Option 2B – additional/optional features Region-wide, including within settlement areas



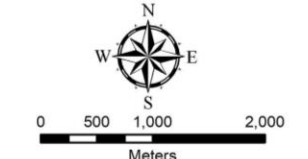
Niagara Region Natural Environment Work Program Water Resource System - Option 1 and 2

Legend

- Key Hydrologic Features**
-  Wetlands
 -  Waterbodies
 -  Watercourses
- Key Hydrologic Areas**
-  Significant Groundwater Recharge Areas
 -  Highly Vulnerable Aquifers
 -  Roads
 -  Railway
 -  Settlement Areas



Conceptual figure for discussion purposes only



June 11, 2020

Your Feedback is Requested



Next Steps



1. Receive feedback through 2nd point of engagement with public, stakeholders, and Indigenous groups
2. Analyze the input received to recommend the final preferred options
3. Seek council endorsement of final preferred options
4. Prepare detailed design of the preferred options and recommendations for OP policies



Updates on Supporting Projects

- Ecological Land Classification (ELC) Mapping Project
 - Update to the existing Natural Areas Inventory (NAI) dataset using 2018 aerial imagery. Project is being completed in collaboration with NPCA staff.
 - Field verification process is currently wrapping-up. Final dataset is expected by the end of 2020.
- Niagara Watershed Plan Project
 - Tertiary-level watershed planning project being completed in accordance with provincial direction for an 'watershed planning equivalency document'. Project is being completed in collaboration with NPCA staff.
 - Early-stages, reviewing background information and preparing draft goals and objectives.



Discussion Questions

- Do you require any additional information or clarification on the options presented?
- Option 1 and 2 have interpreted the provincial minimum standard would not require the Region to identify an NHS within the NEP – do you agree with interpretation?
- What is your vision for how the NEP should be reflected in a Regional Official Plan?
- Is there any requirements or direction of the NEP that we may be overlooking?
- Are there any best practices or lesson-learnt from other Regional municipalities that you could share with us?



Niagara Escarpment Commission

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Niagara Escarpment Commission
An agency of the Government of Ontario

March 22, 2018

INFORMATION REPORT

Final Regional Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

BACKGROUND

The policies of the Growth Plan (2017) identify that the Province will map a Natural Heritage System (NHS) for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), in order to support a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term approach to planning for the protection of the Region's natural heritage and biodiversity. In 2017, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) led the development of the criteria, methodology and mapping for the NHS. A public consultation on the draft NHS took place from July to October 2017, including a 92 day Environmental Registry posting, technical workshops and open houses. Staff presented an Information Report to the Commission on the draft proposed NHS in October 2017. The Report provided some high level comments on the draft NHS from a technical perspective, given that the NHS has not been identified in the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) Area.

The Province has released the final NHS mapping (see Map 1 attached), together with an Agricultural System plan. Together, the two plans will bring greater protections to natural areas and farmland in the GGH. The NHS for the Growth Plan is made up of natural heritage features (e.g. wetlands and woodlands), and areas connected by corridors (linkages), and includes natural areas and public lands and lands that have been restored or have the potential to be restored to a natural state, as well as agricultural lands that enable ecological functions to continue.

The total area covered by the NHS is approximately 1.18 million hectares or forty-five percent of the Growth Plan for the GGS (excluding settlement areas). Seventy-two percent of the NHS consists of natural cover (terrestrial or aquatic). New policies of the Growth Plan (2017) require municipalities to incorporate the provincially identified NHS outside of settlement areas, as an overlay into official plans and to apply the appropriate policies to maintain, restore and/or improve its diversity and connectivity. Municipalities will be able to refine the mapping of the NHS (to include more detail), through a municipal comprehensive review (MCR), which will be subject to approval by the Province.

DISCUSSION

The final NHS for the Growth Plan has not been applied or mapped in the Greenbelt Plan Area (including the NEP Area). Consultation on the draft proposed NHS resulted in the following actions and/or revisions to the mapping:

- Detailed review of the proposed NHS to correct identified mapping errors
- Review and consideration of additional fine-scale natural heritage data provided by five conservation authorities
- Review of requests for regional and site specific removals from the NHS, and revision of mapping where such requests were consistent with the principles and criteria of the NHS

The principles applied in mapping the system included the use of well documented criteria and rationale, and the application of a defensible and repeatable methodology. The scale of the system was focussed on the regional landscape context and the connectivity of the NHS to the existing NHS of adjacent areas (i.e. the Greenbelt NHS), was also considered, to the extent possible.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) and the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt Plan define and base their respective land use designations on a network of natural systems which are defined to include natural heritage and water resource systems. The NEP Land Use Designation Criteria of the Escarpment Natural Area and Escarpment Protection Area, although identified and defined differently because of the age of the NEP, encompass the same types of features that form the NHS of the Greenbelt.

As described in the NEP (2017) Part 1, Landscape Approach, the natural system of the NEP Area is managed as a connected and integrated landscape, given the functional inter-relationships between them. The NEP system of land use designations is viewed as the natural heritage system of the NEP Area, with the Escarpment Natural Area as the “core” area of the system, containing the most significant features in a relatively natural state, including wildlife habitat and geological features. The Escarpment Protection Area relates to the “linkage” areas of the system, and these lands are recognized as being important because of their visual and environmental significant and buffer function to the more sensitive Escarpment Natural Areas. The landscape approach of the NEP complements the Natural Heritage System of the rest of the Greenbelt Area. Together with the surrounding landscape, these systems work towards functioning as a connected natural heritage system.

NEXT STEPS

Municipalities will be required to incorporate the Growth Plan NHS policies and mapping into their official plans as an overlay over the next few years, to ensure that land use planning decisions are protecting natural heritage and biodiversity in the GGH, consistent with the Growth Plan. Municipalities may, through a MCR, refine the

provincial mapping of the NHS with greater precision. The full range of agricultural uses and normal farm practices are permitted within the NHS.

CONCLUSIONS

The Province has finalized the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The NHS for the Growth Plan does not include lands within the Greenbelt Area (including the NEP Area). The existing NHS within the Greenbelt remains in place.

The land use designations and applicable policies of the NEP (2017) will continue to apply to the assessment of development proposals in the NEP Area, there are no changes as a result of the implementation of the Growth Plan NHS. As provided in the Places to Grow Act (2005), where there is a conflict between the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan or Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Growth Plan regarding the natural environment or human health, the direction that provides more protection to the natural environment or human health prevails. There may be some limited situations when the NEC as a commenting agency on development proposals adjacent to the NEP Area.

The GGH contains many of Ontario's most significant ecological and hydrologic natural environments and scenic landscapes, including the Niagara Escarpment and the other natural areas in the Greenbelt Area and beyond. Overall, the identification of a regional scale NHS, together with the accompanying Growth Plan (2017) policies is positive, and will work to support a holistic landscape approach and greater connectivity with the existing NHS of the Greenbelt Plans, allowing opportunities for enhanced protection of species habitat, biodiversity, ecological health and ecosystem resiliency at the regional level.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission accept the Report for informational purposes.

Prepared by:

Original signed by:

Lisa Grbinicek
Senior Strategic Advisor

Approved by:

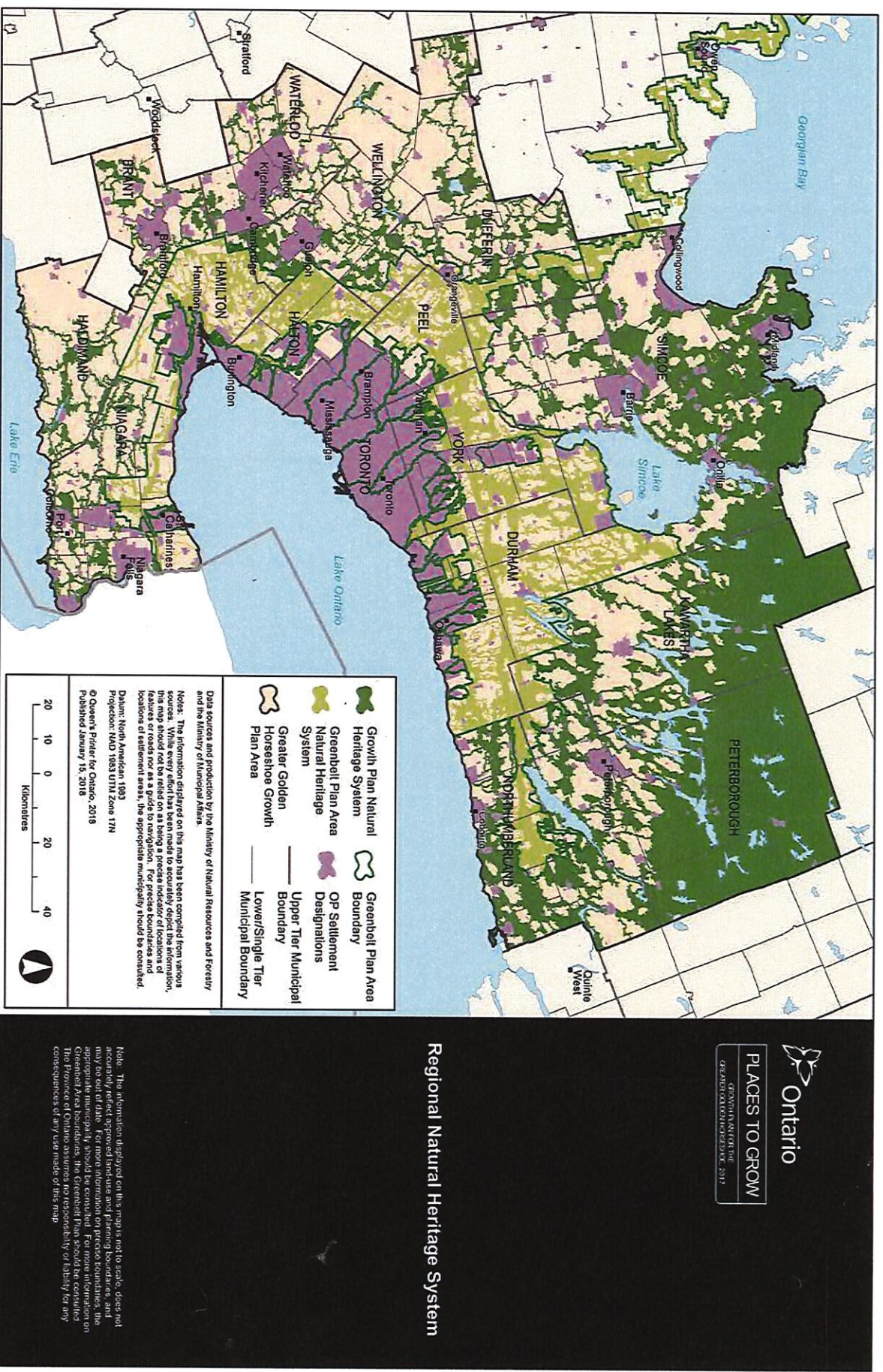
Original signed by:

David Ayotte
Director

Attachments: Map of Final Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan

Figure 4.

Regional Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.



Ontario
PLACES TO GROW
GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE
 GROWTH PLAN FOR THE
 GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE 2017

Regional Natural Heritage System

Note: The information displayed on this map is not to scale, does not accurately reflect approved land-use and planning boundaries, and may be out of date. For more information on precise boundaries, the appropriate municipality should be consulted. For more information on Greenbelt Area boundaries, the Greenbelt Plan should be consulted. The Province of Ontario assumes no responsibility or liability for any consequences of any user made of this map.