

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Chapter 3 – Section 2. WATERSHED PLANNING

SUMMARY

The *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020* (“PPS”) requires that watersheds be the ‘ecologically meaningful scale for integrated and long-term planning’. This is not a new concept. However, recent Provincial changes have reinforced the need for watershed planning to ‘inform’ municipal land-use planning.

Watershed planning is a methodology used to define values, objectives and targets that support the protection, enhancement, or restoration of the natural resources (with an emphasis on water resources) within a watershed through the development of management plans and policies.

Through a 2018 update to the protocol for environmental planning services in the Region, responsibility for ‘watershed planning’ was transferred to the Region, and the responsibility for ‘subwatershed planning’ was transferred to the local municipalities.

To facilitate this transfer of responsibilities, a Watershed Planning Discussion Paper (“WPDP”) was completed (see Overview below to access the Discussion Paper). The WPDS identified the need for additional watershed planning to be completed to inform various aspects of the new Niagara Official Plan (“NOP”). To meet this need, a consultant has been retained and a project to prepare a Niagara Watershed Plan (“NWP”) is underway. NPCA staff are involved in the project.

The NWP is the next step in implementing a watershed planning program and will ensure that the NOP is appropriately informed by watershed planning in accordance with provincial requirements. The ongoing work of the NWP project has been informing the work on the NOP on an iterative basis.

A Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper for the NWP project was shared with the local municipalities, the public, and other stakeholders in November 2020 for input (see Overview below to access the Discussion Paper). Once a draft of the entire NWP is complete it will be shared with Regional Council. A comprehensive engagement program will then follow before the plan is finalized.

| Integration Guide for Sub-sections Reported in PDS 17-2021 | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Structure | <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Land Needs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SABR | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Aggregates |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural Heritage incl. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Systems Options |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District/Secondary Plans | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watershed Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Design | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climate Change |



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The updated Provincial Plans in 2017 increased the emphasis on the need for watershed planning to ‘inform’ land-use planning. This was accompanied by a Provincial shift in the direction for responsibility for watershed planning.

Specifically, Section 4.2.1.1 of the 2017 *Growth Plan* states “*Municipalities, partnering with conservation authorities as appropriate, will ensure that watershed planning is undertaken to support a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term approach to the protection, enhancement, or restoration of the quality and quantity of water within a watershed.*”

Coinciding with this Provincial direction, in 2018, there was a transfer of responsibility for a number of environmental planning responsibilities from the NPCA to Niagara Region.

At the time of this shift, the Region was progressing with its NOP, and that the process, roles, and responsibilities for watershed planning would be better refined through that process.

To facilitate this transfer of responsibilities, one of the background reports for the natural environment work program (“NEWP”) was the Watershed Planning Discussion Paper (“WPDP”). The purpose of the WPDP was to better understand the history, new provincial direction, and the updated process, roles, and responsibilities related to watershed planning in the Region. The WPDP provided direction in three key areas:

- The scope of watershed planning that is required to ‘inform’ the NOP.
- Policies for watershed planning that should be included in the NOP.
- A framework for watershed planning in Niagara moving forward.

The Watershed Planning Discussion Paper (October 2019) can be accessed here:

[Watershed Planning Discussion Paper \(October 2019\)](https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/natural-environment-watershed-planning.pdf)

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Following the completion of the WPDP, a project to complete a Niagara Watershed Plan (“NWP”) was initiated. The NWP is being prepared as a watershed planning equivalency document in accordance with provincial direction.

A “watershed” is defined as an area that is drained by a river and its tributaries. The NWP is being completed at a ‘tertiary-level’. The ‘tertiary’ watersheds in Niagara are

Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and the Niagara River. Following the completion of the NOP project there will be a need for the Region to complete more detailed watershed planning at the 'quaternary-level'. The NWP has delineated 12 quaternary watersheds in the Region. After that, subwatershed planning becomes the responsibility of the local municipalities. Subwatershed plans are typically completed in support of Secondary Plans or similar large-scale developments.

The NWP is informing the NOP. This work is ongoing on an iterative basis, which is the typical way that watershed planning informs the land-use planning. Several highlights include:

- Informing what features and systems should be considered required components of the WRS.
- The integration of the NHS and WRS. It was the work of the NWP that confirmed the need to consider these systems collectively as the integrated natural environment system (NES).
- Providing criteria to support the evaluation of various growth options in the Region.

The NWP project was first introduced as part of the virtual public information centre for the NOP in September 2020. A Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper for the NWP project was shared with local municipalities, the public, and other stakeholders in November 2020 for input. This included the use of a survey which was widely shared.

The Niagara Watershed Plan – Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper (October 2020) can be accessed here:

[Niagara Watershed Plan – Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper \(October 2020\)](https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/niagara-watershed-plan-discussion-paper.pdf)
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NPCA staff have been actively participating in the process. Region staff are thankful for their willingness to participate, provide technical support, and direct us to a range of data and other background information that has been required.

The NWP will be a thorough and comprehensive report that will inform the NOP, future watershed planning, and ongoing land-use planning in the Region. Once a draft of the entire NWP is complete it will be shared with Regional Council. A comprehensive engagement program with the public and other stakeholders will then follow before the plan is finalized.