

# GREEN AMONG THE GREY

Fifth Anniversary Progress Report on the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt

*February 2010*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance would like to thank all of its member groups for their thoughtful input into this progress report, and for their dedication to protecting Ontario's Greenbelt.



[www.greenbeltalliance.ca](http://www.greenbeltalliance.ca)

**Our Food, Our Water, Our Clean Air.**

**The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance** is a diverse multi-stakeholder coalition of more than 80 organizations who share a common vision for protecting and expanding the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt. **Environmental Defence** is the coordinator of the **Ontario Greenbelt Alliance**.



## FOREWORD

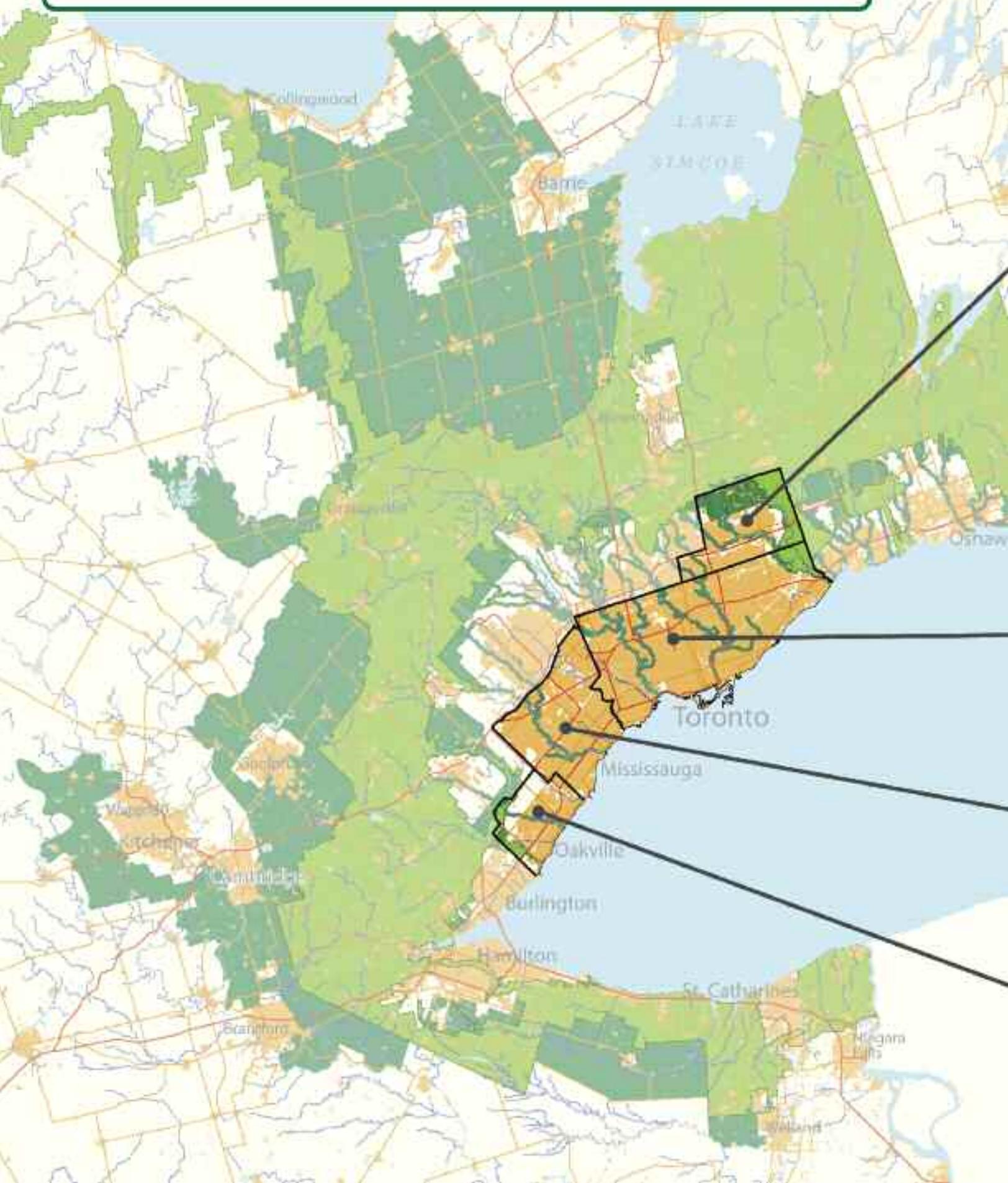
As a Member of Parliament from the Greenbelt area, I'm delighted to celebrate the Greenbelt's Fifth Anniversary. The Greenbelt showcases some of what makes our region so unique, including wetlands and watersheds, farmland and forests, countryside and communities. And, while this milestone is a great opportunity for celebrating the boon of the Greenbelt, it's important to also reflect on the real value of it, which is its protection of our foodlands, our water, and our air.

Protecting such a large area of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land from development and urban sprawl is no small feat. The establishment of the Greenbelt legislation in 2005 represents the work of citizens, communities, environmental groups, agricultural organizations and the Ontario government. This spectacular effort demonstrates how much we care about ensuring future generations of Ontarians have access to green spaces, clean water, local food, which is a legacy we can all be proud of.

HON. MICHAEL CHONG, P.C., | M.P. FOR WELLINGTON-HALTON HILLS



In 2009 the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance launched Greenbelt 2.0, a detailed proposal depicting where the Greenbelt needs to grow in order to fulfill the vision of the original Greenbelt Plan. Since the release of Greenbelt 2.0, Greenbelt expansion efforts have begun in the following communities,



## MARKHAM

Farmland in Markham is disappearing at an alarming rate. By creating a Foodbelt in Markham we will preserve some of Canada's best farmland in perpetuity.



## PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Prince Edward County is under severe threat of inappropriate and rampant development. The area is an important blend of good agricultural land and important environmental features. Greenbelt expansion into this area will protect this small island, its extensive shorelines and vibrant agricultural community.



## TORONTO

Expanding the Greenbelt into Toronto through the Humber and Don Rivers will literally connect the city's two and a half million residents with the farmland that provides them with local foods and the green space that helps clean their air and water.



## MISSISSAUGA

By bringing the Greenbelt further into Mississauga through the Credit River we will encourage a more tangible relationship and greater awareness and support for the farming communities and ecological systems that are an important part of Mississauga and the Region of Peel.



## OAKVILLE

Greenbelt expansion into the Town of Oakville will provide enduring protection of the City's green spaces and will strengthen current municipal protection. This will also bolster Halton's new and expansive Natural Heritage System.



# GREENBELT EXPANSION IN PROGRESS

-  Current Greenbelt boundaries
-  Greenbelt expansion areas proposed in Greenbelt 2.0
-  Built boundary

10 0 10 20 30 40km

Map prepared from Esri's Cartographic Reference Base of Ontario, GeoGratis (2016), Ministry of Transportation, Ontario, 2016. Built Boundary for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2016 & Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016. Reproduced with permission of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Greenbelt boundaries © Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016. Reproduced with permission. Map design by the Cowi Firm, 2016. Esri logo.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five years ago, the Ontario government put the public interest first and developed a strategy to protect dwindling farmlands and sensitive ecological systems, and to stop the uncontrolled urban sprawl that was occurring in Canada's most densely populated region. The Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt was born.

Five years in, the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance is taking a look back to evaluate the impact that the Greenbelt has had on the environment and the communities within and around it. There is no doubt that the landscape of the Greater Golden Horseshoe is better off because of Greenbelt legislation. Farmlands, watersheds and other ecologically sensitive areas that would have been paved over and developed remain in their natural state.

*Because of the Greenbelt:*

- Ecologically important green spaces like Boyd Park, Rouge Park, Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve and North Leslie have been protected.
- Endangered animals, insects, and plants now live in permanently protected habitats that respect and enable natural corridors.
- The agricultural community is benefitting from a growing community of Greenbelt supporters, who look for local growers at farmer's markets and support innovative projects like the Holland Marsh Growers Association, and policy changes like those that promote Ontario's beleaguered grape growers.
- It has been estimated that the Greenbelt contributes \$2.6 billion annually to the ecological services of the region

The Greenbelt has galvanized and rallied communities to protect their local environment and whole ecological systems. Polls consistently show a large majority of Ontarians value the Greenbelt. Most encouraging is that 91% of Ontarians surveyed in a poll conducted by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation agree that "The Greenbelt is one of the most important contributions of our generation to the future of Ontario."

But the work is not done.

Five years from now, Ontario should have a Greenbelt that has been expanded to offer more complete permanent protection to entire ecosystems and areas that are being threatened by rampant development. The prevalence of aggregate mining and the imposition of damaging infrastructure on Greenbelt lands should also be reduced. Lastly, Ontarians should be celebrating a robust farming community that is supported by favourable tax and agricultural policies.

## INTRODUCTION

“I am sure that all members of the Legislature and especially those from the Central Ontario Region and constituencies along the Niagara Escarpment recognize the vital necessity of checking urban sprawl, of preserving community identity and of ensuring that there will always be sufficient green space among the grey.”<sup>2</sup>

The Ontario leader who spoke these words was not Premier Dalton McGuinty. Given how utterly relevant the content remains to present-day southern Ontario, it is perhaps surprising that this quotation is not even recent. It is, in fact, decades old and was spoken in 1973 by former Premier Bill Davis. It is one of many impassioned defences Davis made of his then recently adopted *Niagara Escarpment Protection and Development Act* – a visionary statute that was much maligned at the time.

Thankfully for Ontarians, and like the layers in the pink sedimentary sandstone that the main legislative building at Queen’s Park itself is made from, subsequent governments of all political stripes have built on Davis’ legacy to ensure that “*there will always be sufficient green space among the grey*”.

The government of Bob Rae announced the protection of Rouge Park in 1995.

Mike Harris adopted the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act* in 2001.

And on February 28, 2005, the *Greenbelt* Plan came into effect under Premier Dalton McGuinty. At 1.8 million acres, the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt is the largest area protected in southern Ontario to date, encompassing the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM), Rouge Park and another million acres besides. It consolidates, and expands upon, all efforts by previous governments.

Before the Greenbelt’s creation five years ago, there were more problems than solutions with respect to urban planning in the Golden Horseshoe region. A rapidly increasing population, worsening gridlock and antiquated or non-existent public transit, disappearing farmland and green space, and an incoherent response from area municipalities added up to mounting frustration for area residents.

The establishment of the Greenbelt was a direct response to these concerns. The Greenbelt is a collective statement of optimism in the future of our province.

As this progress report will demonstrate, the Greenbelt has accomplished many of its original objectives. It has led to the protection of previously unprotected green space such as Boyd Park in Vaughan and the Eramosa Karst in Hamilton. It has emboldened important agricultural areas such as the Holland Marsh and the Niagara Peninsula. It has provided the planning framework necessary to create more livable and coherent downtowns, and it has protected increasingly scarce water and species resources. It has been estimated that the Greenbelt contributes \$2.6 billion annually to the ecological services of the region.<sup>3</sup>

While the Greenbelt has, and will continue to, contribute significantly to the quality of life in this region for years to come, the pressures that led to its creation remain. As Ontario celebrates its Fifth Anniversary together, we need to re-commit ourselves to ensuring that it thrives, and grows, and builds on the living legacy initiated by Ontario's leaders nearly four decades ago.

## 1: Successes of the Greenbelt

To truly relish and celebrate the Fifth Anniversary of the Greenbelt, one must remember what planning was like in southern Ontario just 10 years ago. Urban sprawl was rampant, and leapfrogging over and across prime farmland was happening at an alarming rate. According to the Neptis Foundation, maintaining the status quo of urbanization would have cost Ontario over 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of prime farmland in just over 25 years.<sup>4</sup> Hundreds of species were identified as “species of concern”, habitats were fragmenting as various regions and municipalities competed for land to pave over, further eroding the natural vegetative cover, which had dropped to an alarming 5% in some municipalities. One single development on the Oak Ridges Moraine threatened to sever the last remaining green corridor along the area's spine.

Five years ago, the Greenbelt changed the urban landscape of southern Ontario for the better, and likely forever. It has been described as a model for the world. A comparative study completed by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy found that *“Ontario's Greenbelt is positioned to be the most successful and most useful Greenbelt in the world.”*<sup>5</sup>

It's not hard to see why.

At 1.8 million acres, it is the largest and most diverse in the world. Many of Ontario's endangered and at-risk species call it home.<sup>6</sup> Wine made in the Greenbelt is world-class, confounding experts in blind taste tests. 7,100 working farms in the Greenbelt ensure our foodland security at a time when other countries are seeking ways to strengthen their food production resources.<sup>7</sup>

More than 100 municipalities now share an important land use planning trust, and are committed by law to defending a large continuous green space. Focusing growth gives public transit a chance to compete with car commuting, and relieves residents of the obligation to fund endless infrastructure projects stretching over the horizon. And, though rural spaces outside the Greenbelt are still under development pressure, the Greenbelt has begun to focus growth in urban centres. Because of the Greenbelt and the associated *Places to Grow Act*, the urban boundaries of many municipalities are either frozen or close to it in key places. Rather than endlessly sprawling out, they now need to create more livable and coherent communities and grow from within.

*The following are just a few of the many success stories of the Ontario Greenbelt:*

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Greenbelt is home to a great number of officially recognized Species at Risk. Amazing endangered animals and plants, such as the spotted turtle, cucumber magnolia, Jefferson salamander, redbreast dace, American ginseng, and monarch butterfly call the Greenbelt home. The greatest threat to most of these animals, insects and plants is habitat loss. Key to the continued survival of these and other species is an interconnected system of natural habitat - exactly the sort of system that the Greenbelt provides.

Recently released recovery strategies for the Jefferson salamander and redbreast dace, for example, identify, for the first time, the critical habitats of these species in need of protection. Given the substantial overlap between these habitats and the Greenbelt, it is clear that the continued protection of the Greenbelt and the continued survival of these species are synonymous.



*The unique jumping minnow, the redbreast dace, is one of the endangered species living in the Greenbelt.*

## AGRICULTURE IN THE HOLLAND MARSH

Thanks to the Greenbelt, and with the support of the *Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation*, Holland Marsh farmers are embarking on an exciting new chapter in their history. At only

18,000 acres, the Holland Marsh – in the north of the Greenbelt at the base of Lake Simcoe – is home to some of the richest soils in the country. Despite its relatively small size, the Marsh provides something approaching 15% of all the vegetables grown in Ontario.

With a grant from the *Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation*, Marsh farmers have founded the Holland Marsh Growers Association, and created their own brand of produce: Holland Marsh Gold. Responding to consumer demand for fresh local fare, they are also working to reduce their use of pesticides and are in the process of certifying with *Local Food Plus*, a non-profit group that certifies farmers and processors for local sustainable food production.

Vegetables will be grown, stored, processed and packaged in the Marsh, shortening the entire distribution chain, and strengthening the local economy. In the past, Holland Marsh farmers have focused mostly on growing carrots, onions and celery. The new program builds on efforts that are underway to diversify crop production to meet the wider demand across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Marsh farmers are already growing more than 40 different vegetables ranging from red and green leaf lettuce, endive, and purple carrots to bok choy, Asian radishes and kohlrabi.

After decades of exporting their product, Holland Marsh farmers are succeeding in creating a better business model involving the local sale of new, more varied, and higher value products.

## ONTARIO GRAPES

Ontario's vineyards are an iconic part of the province's rural landscape and an important part of our economy. However, for years the province's grape growers, many of whom reside in the Greenbelt, have been struggling within a marketing system that favours cheap imported grapes.

Under the *Wine Content and Labeling Act*, Ontario wineries have been able to buy inexpensive finished wine from off-shore vendors and create a product labeled as "Cellared in Canada" by blending in a minimum amount of locally grown wine. This unfair policy has led to foreign grapes



**Grape growers and supporters stomp grapes in front of an LCBO in St. Catharines, Ontario.**

being imported into Ontario in the magnitude of tens of thousands of tonnes a year, forcing many of the province's local grape growers to close or to sell their land due to a lack of buyers.

Thankfully, the 2010 crop will be entering into a market with better potential for local growers.

At the urging of the *Ontario Greenbelt Alliance*, which launched a high-profile campaign called “**Put the ‘O’ Back in LCBO**”, the Ontario government has released a new plan for Ontario's wine industry that will eventually phase out “Cellared in Canada” blends and instead support **Vintners' Quality Alliance (VQA)** wines, which are made from 100% Ontario grapes. The new plan sets a direction that will more clearly identify and market VQA wines and create a larger market for Ontario's beleaguered grape growers' products.

The policy adjustment is in large part due to the unique cross section of groups who rallied for change, including farmers and agricultural commodities groups, environmental non-governmental organizations and wine buyers and drinkers.

Were it not for the organizing framework provided by the Greenbelt, it is unlikely this unique and powerful campaign partnership would have taken form.

## **BOYD PARK**

Boyd Park is a 153-acre jewel of biodiversity in the middle of the Greater Toronto Area. Its majestic forest canopy and Humber River tributary are home to a huge number of mammal, amphibian, reptile and plant species, many of which are threatened or endangered.

In 2003, a disparate group of citizens opposed a planned four-lane highway through the environmentally significant and sensitive portion of the Park. Friends of Boyd Park and Environmental Defence launched a rare private prosecution against York Region to stop the Environmental Assessment, arguing that the scope of the assessment was too narrow and that a First Nations cultural heritage site in the Park was threatened. Pierre Berton, who famously lived nearby and visited the Park many times, spoke at a Friends rally and declared, “I hope you'll all raise your voices and your pens, and let the people at the council level know how we feel. Get mad as hell.”<sup>8</sup> To great public support, on February 28, 2005, Boyd Park was added to the final map of the Greenbelt, one of the only sections of the Greenbelt in a so-called “Urban Area.” On Valentine's Day 2006, then Minister of the Environment Laurel Broten removed Boyd Park from the Terms of Reference of the Environmental Assessment. The destructive road project died to the popping of champagne corks by Vaughan residents celebrating on the lawn of Queen's Park.

## ROUGE PARK

At over 47 km<sup>2</sup> (11,500 acres) in size, the Rouge Park is the largest urban wilderness park in the world. The 250 km-long Rouge River system (adding all its tributaries together) is one of the best examples of endangered Carolinian habitat in Ontario and, as it flows south through Toronto, is one of the few places where the Greenbelt is physically connected to Lake Ontario.

The creation of the Greenbelt provided the framework for the government to add substantially to Rouge Park through the creation of Bob Hunter Park (500 acres) and the addition of 3,500 additional acres of adjoining provincially-owned land. Subsequent to the Greenbelt's creation, the government-owned Ontario Realty Corporation has also turned over hundreds of acres of other ecologically sensitive lands throughout the Greenbelt – from Glenorchy in Oakville, to the Eramosa Karst in Hamilton, to Hidden Valley in Burlington – for conservation purposes.



*(Left) Autumn in the Rouge Valley; The 40 -metre bluffs of the Rouge Valley.*

## DUFFINS ROUGE AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE

The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve includes about 4,700 acres of prime agricultural lands in north Pickering. The preserve is part of a larger area (about 39,500 acres) that was expropriated in the 1970s for a proposed airport. The Preserve lands are high-quality farmlands. They have been recognized as Prime Agricultural Areas and lands that qualify for

restriction to agricultural or farm-related uses under the Region of Durham Official Plan, the Provincial Policy Statement, the *Greenbelt Act* and the Greenbelt Plan. Environmental groups rejoiced with the Preserve's inclusion in the Greenbelt.

The Pickering community has gone to extreme lengths to ensure the protection of the Preserve. The Green Door Alliance and Whitevale Citizens appealed an Ontario Municipal Board decision that would have removed land easements and left the area vulnerable to development. The Ontario Realty Corporation supported the appeal. Eventually the community's persistence led to the government of Ontario adopting the *Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act*, and putting the easements back in place.



**Public opinion polls show that Ontarians strongly support the Greenbelt.**

## **NORTH LESLIE**

One of the Greenbelt campaign's biggest victories was the designation of 425 acres as a Greenbelt Natural Heritage System on the so-called North Leslie lands in Richmond Hill. Located at one of the Oak Ridges Moraine's critical "discharge zones," the site contains Provincially Significant Wetlands at the headwaters of the Rouge River. Three major tributaries of the Rouge pass through the site, some bearing redbreast dace and trout, both coldwater species. An unusually large colony of Great Blue Herons, dubbed "Heron Manhattan", resided in the trees.

The North Leslie lands were threatened by a development application for 7,800 units that went before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). A volunteer team of lawyers called evidence from staff at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of the Environment endorsing the province's previous position that a large portion of the site should be protected.

The hearing stretched over two years. In the end, while a major swath of the area was preserved, the OMB did approve a very large development and concluded in its decision: *"These lands are intended to be developed with more dwellings of low or medium density, similar to 1990's style subdivisions. In 2006, the board would normally require a more enlightened vision."*



*Leapfrog growth in Simcoe County is putting the watershed at risk.*

## 2: Still Under Threat

Over the last five years, the Greenbelt has given Ontarians a mechanism to halt sprawl, improve our quality of life, and ensure greater access to local foods. However, both within and adjacent to the Greenbelt there are areas that remain under threat.

*Some of the major threats to the Greenbelt include:*

### LEAPFROGGING AND SPRAWL

As the population of the Greater Toronto Area continues to expand, municipalities are struggling to find a balance between protecting agricultural land and green spaces and accommodating their growth. Of particular concern are “leapfrog” developments happening in communities just on the other side of the Greenbelt from major urban centres. The fate of the Ottawa Greenbelt is instructive here. The area of this Greenbelt, when it was created, was too small to function as an urban separator. As a consequence, development has “leap-frogged” over it to an amazing extent. This Greenbelt, originally intended as the outer boundary of Ottawa, now finds itself an island of green in a sea of suburban sprawl.

#### **Simcoe County**

Simcoe County is one of the fastest growing regions in Canada, but was inexplicably left out of the Greenbelt. Given that the Greenbelt protects some, but not all, of the Lake Simcoe watershed, this creates the conundrum of having two policies governing one watershed. Moreover,

Simcoe County faces huge growth pressures. Given that existing developments are already severely stressing Lake Simcoe and its watershed, the proposed tripling of the area's population is an environmental nonstarter.

The good news is that thanks to the persistent work of Campaign Lake Simcoe, the province has created the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan as an attempt to restore the health of the Lake Simcoe watershed. The Plan sets targets for natural cover restoration and protection and limits on phosphorus inputs into the lake. The problem is that it grandfathered projects like the Big Bay Point mega-marina, a development proposal that would carve a 30-acre hole into the Lake Simcoe shoreline. It is also undermined by the Ontario government's *Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth*, a sprawl-friendly document that would set the stage for massive development in the Lake Simcoe watershed.

Ultimately, the Greenbelt should be extended into all of Simcoe County. Developments should also be evaluated based on the "survival of the greenest" principle, wherein approvals would go to the projects with the smallest ecological footprints.

### **Prince Edward County**

The local agricultural community of Prince Edward County is flourishing. Its producers and regional cuisine are considered leaders in the sustainable food movement. Its wineries are gaining favourable recognition. Until very recently, the pace of development in Prince Edward County was manageable, and the Prince Edward County Official Plan protected its agricultural and environmental features adequately. Today, Prince Edward County is at risk of being overwhelmed by poorly-planned, piecemeal developments that threaten its woodlots, wetlands, species at risk and agricultural viability as a region.

The 1,043 km<sup>2</sup> island, with an amazing 800 km of shoreline, is very desirable to developers. As one example of an ongoing dispute, Friends of East Lake currently have an OMB appeal against the Municipality of Prince Edward County over a rezoning decision to approve a 237 seasonal cottage development on the shoreline of East Lake, an area that should be protected from urban uses. The development is the largest of its kind in the area's history. Prince Edward County, with its rich culture, and prime agricultural and natural heritage areas is just as deserving of Greenbelt protection as Niagara and Simcoe Counties.



***Prince Edward County – shores of Sandbanks Provincial Park.***



*Boyd Park is home to a number of threatened or endangered plants and animals.*

### **Paris Galt Moraine**

This geological feature extends from the towns of Delhi and Simcoe in the southwest to the village of Erin in the northeast. The moraine (really a belt of interconnected small hills) is approximately 6.5 to 8 km wide and features landforms such as eskers and drumlins and a hummocky topography. A small part of the northeastern section of the moraine complex lies within the existing Greenbelt area but the remainder is unprotected.

The City of Guelph, which is dependent on groundwater for its supply of drinking water, is currently developing a Water Supply Master Plan in order to ensure adequate supplies are available to satisfy population growth projections over the next 50 years. To meet the increased demand for water supply, the Water Supply Master Plan outlines the possibility of siting new wells outside the boundaries of the City of Guelph. One of the identified alternatives is to take additional water from the Amabel aquifer, which lies under, and is fed by, the Paris Galt Moraine. Additionally, the County of Wellington completed a detailed Groundwater Protection Study in 2006 that led to proposed amendments to its Official Plan, specifically with regard to wellhead protection areas. The Groundwater Protection Study also recommended that development be prohibited “on the moraine system that would diminish recharge function and/or impair quality.”<sup>9</sup>

As a result of its desire to safeguard its water supply, the City of Guelph is investigating options for the protection of the Paris Galt Moraine.

### **Agricultural Land in Markham**

Local agriculture is an essential piece of the tradition and landscape of the Town of Markham. In fact, the Town of Markham contains some of the most productive farmland in all of Canada. However, despite the importance of such prime agricultural soil, Markham is losing its farmland faster than any other municipality across the Greater Toronto Area.<sup>10</sup>

Farmland throughout the region is being paved over and replaced with low-density housing at an alarming rate. Between 2001 and 2006, Markham lost 43% of its remaining farmland.<sup>11</sup>

As seen across the Greater Toronto Area, unchecked urban sprawl leads to gridlock and greater pollution. In Markham, sprawl continues to threaten the Rouge watershed, which is already showing signs of stress due to land use practices.

There is hope.

Markham Council is currently considering the creation of a “Foodbelt”. This innovative proposal would protect 2,000 hectares of irreplaceable agricultural lands. It would also ensure the protection of the middle and upper reaches of the Rouge watershed, including more than 17 tributaries, headwaters and small streams.



*Girl Guides plant a white pine tree.*

### **Brant County**

There is serious leapfrog development pressure in Brant County.

Proposals for two new highways are driving land speculation. As the County completes a review of its Official Plan, councilors and staff are being pressured by developers, landbankers and some farmers to allow sprawl development

Brantford is also considering annexing prime farmland from Brant County. The community group, Sustainable Brant, has been lobbying for Brantford to “grow up, not out”. In addition the County is now in an OMB hearing regarding an approval by its council to allow development next to the edge of Brantford. The Province wants this land protected for the 424 corridor, while Sustainable Brant wants this prime farmland to form a “countryside line” to stop sprawl like that in Waterloo.

## **QUARRIES**

The Greenbelt Plan offers protection to natural heritage and hydrologic features, yet it permits applications to develop aggregate quarries – including those extracting below the water table. Though source water protection should be a priority, both inside the Greenbelt and out, these quarries provide a direct pathway to the aquifer. They remove quality filtration material, pump millions of litres of water daily through dewatering, and involve activities like on-site fuel storage that may risk source water. Rehabilitation of closed sites as landfills, even when flooded to lakes, can create surface to groundwater issues. The engineering works, proposed by these quarries, to mitigate their unacceptable impacts will require maintenance and operability in perpetuity.

The Greenbelt is challenged in other significant ways by quarry operation. Farmland, which is to be preserved and actively farmed under the Plan, is permanently lost. Species at risk and their habitats are threatened. Natural features are negatively impacted, or scarred forever, and wildlife and ecological corridors are severed.

*A large number of quarries are proposed for the Greenbelt. They include:*

- James Dick proposes to extract up to 2.5 million tonnes annually of crushed stone from the Rockfort Farm. An important and well known natural and wildlife area, the site is located in an environmentally sensitive headwater area in Caledon, between the hamlets of Terra Cotta and Belfountain, adjacent to the Greenbelt.
- Nelson Aggregates plans a 200 acre quarry on the sensitive Mount Nemo plateau in Burlington, part of the Niagara Escarpment, and a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Mount Nemo is a source water recharge area with over 20 tributaries originating on top of it and along its slopes, including the headwaters of Grindstone and Bronte Creeks.
- St Marys Cement proposes to extract up to 3 million tonnes annually from the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System in Flamborough. The site, nestled within Significant Woodlands and Provincially Significant Wetlands, sits within the 2 year Time of Travel Wellhead Protection Area and the significant recharge area, for the groundwater-based municipal drinking water system for the community of Carlisle, in the City of Hamilton.
- The Norval Shale Quarry has been proposed for development in one of the rare remaining natural areas in Brampton. The quarry would be in the Greenbelt, and would impact the creeks and tributaries of the Credit River watershed, a narrow but important wildlife corridor.

## **UNNECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE**

Highway extensions and power generators are both examples of infrastructure that are tearing holes in the Greenbelt. Poorly planned and narrowly focused infrastructure projects are threatening the health of forests and wetlands in the Greenbelt and taking over some of the province's most productive agricultural land.

The Ontario Power Authority has given the go-ahead to the construction of a 393 MW gas-fired generator on a flood plain in the Lake Simcoe watershed, directly adjacent to the Holland Marsh, in the protected countryside of Ontario's Greenbelt. Originally, the stated "need" for the plant was to meet peak time demands of a growing York Region and to supply the Ontario grid. However, the necessity of the plant must be revisited. Since the project was launched, total energy consumption in Ontario - including in peak times - has declined and future structural growth in the province is forecasted to be in less energy-intensive sectors.



*The Mount Nemo plateau is part of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt and a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve.*

Furthermore, there are a number of concerns about the true environmental impact of the generator. The site was subject to an Environmental Assessment no more rigorous than is required for an emergency 5MW generator and there was no consideration of alternatives. As well, the project's Environmental Assessment was done in a piecemeal fashion (e.g. separate assessments were done for the generator and the new 15 km high pressure gas pipeline that will feed the generator) so no clear understanding of the total impact of the entire project is available.

Plans to put a power plant directly on top of Ontario's "salad bowl" region, known for its production of fresh local foods, are questionable at best.

There also remain a number of proposals for highway expansions that will have a severe impact on the overall health of the Greenbelt. Current proposals include: the 404 north extension, which would severely impact the Maskinonge River; the eastward extension of the 407, which would pave over prime agricultural lands and fragile watershed; the Niagara Mid-Peninsula Highway, which would have a direct impact on the Niagara Escarpment; and the GTA East-West Corridor, which would essentially encourage sprawl and leapfrog development.

While it is understood that there will be infrastructure development to accommodate our growing population, greater emphasis needs to be brought to bear on improving public transportation and preserving the Greenbelt's natural corridors, which cannot survive the impact of new or expanding highways.

### 3: Looking Ahead

**The last five years have proven that the Greenbelt is indispensable for improving Ontarians' quality of life. In a relatively short time, Greenbelt legislation has curbed sprawl, protected green spaces and preserved and bolstered agricultural land in southern Ontario.**

**Beyond the legislation, the Greenbelt has become a place where Ontarians hike, cycle, bird watch, paddle and access local foods.**

**While the Greenbelt is arguably one of the best in the world, with some more work, it can be better. Many of the threats that prompted the Greenbelt's creation persist. Communities and ecosystems within, and adjacent to, the Greenbelt are still in danger due to poor development and misuse.**

**To ensure the long-term effectiveness and protection of the Greenbelt, it is essential to consider the prevailing threats in the context of the big picture and to make policy changes that will support protected ecosystems, healthy communities and strong industries.**

#### **Growth**

When the Greenbelt was created five years ago, many observers warned that it was not quite big enough to accomplish the primary goal that the government set for it: the containment of poorly-planned, low density, urban "sprawl". In southern Simcoe County, in Guelph, in Kitchener-Waterloo and the County of Brant, development is now "leapfrogging" over the Greenbelt. In addition, important natural and agricultural areas in the so-called "whitebelt", to the south of the Greenbelt, were left out when the Greenbelt was created.

Thankfully, the opportunity to "grow the Greenbelt" has not been lost. There is still time to extend the Greenbelt westwards to encompass the Paris Galt Moraine, Brant and Wellington Counties and Waterloo Region, northwards to protect that portion of southern Simcoe County that is not subject to the recently adopted *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*, and eastwards to the burgeoning agricultural and local food landscape of Prince Edward County. There remains the exciting opportunity to physically connect the Greenbelt to Lake Ontario through the wooded valley systems that criss-cross our urban centres. As of this writing, community groups



throughout the Greenbelt are working through their local governments to trigger official Greenbelt growth applications to the provincial government. Active efforts are ongoing in Guelph, Oakville, Markham, Brant, Mississauga, Toronto and Prince Edward County, with more expected throughout 2010 (see the map at the start of this report).

It is surely the most exciting and tangible indicator of the Greenbelt's popularity with Ontarians that so many people want to see it expanded as soon as possible within their communities. The provincial government needs to facilitate and expedite this process.

### **Agricultural Reforms**

The Ontario Greenbelt contains some of the most fertile agricultural lands in all of Canada. This rich soil, combined with the recent boost in demand for local food, should result in a healthy and growing agricultural industry.

However, local farmers face continuing challenges, including competition from cheaply grown imports, poor labeling systems and some unfair taxation laws.

The growing consumer awareness about the importance of buying local foods needs to be bolstered by necessary agricultural policy changes that will support Ontario's farmers and ensure that they are producing foods that are readily available and competitively priced.

The provincial government should consider policies and practices relating to the region's food distribution systems. Changes to these systems could encourage more locally-grown food to move through the Ontario Food Terminal and into large chain grocery distributors. As part of this process, the government should consider the development of a regionally based market system that would allow distributors to buy more regionally-grown food.

The government should take major strides to ensure that food origins are accurately and clearly labeled. Importantly, the creation of local labeling efforts by local farm organizations or collectives should be supported.

Lastly, the Ontario government should work with municipal governments and producers to reform the current property tax policy as it pertains to "value added" and "value retention agricultural activities." It makes no sense at all that a farmer can grow apples, but if they bake those apples into pies, and try to sell these at the farm gate, their taxes skyrocket to punitive levels. This is not the way to build near-urban agriculture, and this significant problem is easily fixed.

### **Aggregate Reforms**

According to industry estimates, the GTA will use about 1.5 billion tonnes of aggregate over the next 25 years.<sup>12</sup> Without significant changes to the way we use cement and aggregates, and locate new quarries, much of it will come from the Greenbelt.

In consideration of the severe effect that open pit mining is having on protected land within the Greenbelt, the Ontario government needs to review and reform its current policies related to aggregate extraction.

Until Ontario reconciles its priorities, between the protection of natural heritage features and source water and the extraction of aggregates, and until the province modernizes its aggregates laws and policies, there should be no new quarries, or quarry expansions in the Greenbelt.

*The Ontario Greenbelt is home to some of the most fertile agricultural land in Canada.*



# CONCLUSION

Farmlands, watersheds and other ecologically sensitive areas within the Greater Golden Horseshoe have been preserved because of Greenbelt legislation.

Natural treasures, such as Boyd Park, Rouge Park, Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve and North Leslie, remain intact as recreation areas, and essential habitats for a number of Ontario's threatened plants, animals and insects. Ontario's agricultural community is bolstered by a community of Greenbelt supporters, and growing awareness of the importance of sustaining local foods sources. Urban sprawl that was rampant and uncontrolled five years ago has been curbed in many places within the Greenbelt borders.

In the five years since its introduction, the groundbreaking legislation has had a tremendously positive effect on the landscape of southern Ontario. On its Fifth Anniversary, the Greenbelt should be celebrated and enhanced.

To strengthen the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt, the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance recommends that:

- the Ontario government reform agricultural and taxation policies to make certain that farming remains viable throughout the region;
- the Ontario government reform aggregate policies to lessen the environmental effects of aggregate mining, and that a moratorium be put on aggregates in the Greenbelt until the existing laws are modernized; and,
- municipal governments make requests to grow the Greenbelt in areas that continue to be ecologically sensitive or susceptible to sprawl and the provincial government expedite this growth.



GREEN AMONG THE GREY



## ENDNOTES

- 1 “Measuring the Possibilities – Greenbelt Public Awareness 2009” Environics poll sponsored by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
- 2 Speech in Ontario Legislature, Premier Bill Davis, June 4, 1973
- 3 “Ontario’s Wealth, Canada’s Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt’s Eco-Services”, David Suzuki Foundation, September, 2008
- 4 “Places to Grow: Better Places, Brighter Future”, Government of Ontario, 2004
- 5 “Ontario’s Greenbelt in an International Context”, Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, February 2008
- 6 “Waiting for the Ark: Endangered Species in the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt”, Environmental Defence, November 2004
- 7 “Greenbelt Grown: A Profile of Agriculture in Ontario’s Greenbelt”, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, November 2009
- 8 “Pierre Berton, 84: Canadian icon was outstanding journalist”, Toronto Star, December 2, 2004
- 9 Wellington County Groundwater Protection Study, 2006
- 10 Markham Agricultural Assessment, 2009
- 11 Markham Agricultural Assessment, 2009
- 12 “Importance of Aggregate”, Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association [“The projected consumption of aggregate in Ontario for the next 25 years is 4 billion tonnes.” 40% of 4 billion is 1.6 billion; to be conservative this report uses 1.5 billion tonnes as the GTA’s 25 year projected aggregate demand.]

More than 80 groups are members of the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance. To view the list of member groups, please visit **[www.greenbeltalliance.ca](http://www.greenbeltalliance.ca)**.

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*Page 4-5: (map) Chris Brackley, As the Crow Flies Cartography*

*Page 8: Todd Crail*

*Page 11: Friends of the Rouge Watershed*

*Page 12: Bonnie Littlely, Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition*

*Page 13: Claire Malcolmson*

*Page 14: John Wellner*

*Page 15: Deb Schulte, Friends of Boyd Park*

*Page 16: Friends of the Rouge Watershed*

*Page 17: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation*

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