



Credit Valley Conservation
Nottawasaga Valley Conservation
Toronto and Region Conservation
Lake Simcoe Region Conservation
Central Lake Ontario Conservation
Kawartha Conservation
Ganaraska Region Conservation
Otonabee Conservation
Lower Trent Conservation

Backgrounder:

Report Card on the Environmental Health of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Adjacent Greenbelt Lands

This Report Card, prepared by the Conservation Authorities Moraine Coalition (CAMC), evaluates the environmental health of the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) and adjacent Greenbelt lands. It shows that the province's Greenbelt and ORM Conservation Plans have been successful in safeguarding existing forest areas, aquatic habitat and groundwater resources. The Report Card recommends those on-the-ground actions, by-laws, other tools and additional resources needed to improve and restore these important lands. The up-to-date, science-based information can also be used to inform the scheduled 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan and the ORM Conservation Plan, which is being undertaken by the Province of Ontario in 2015.

Environmental review reveals successes and challenges

Over the last six years, experts from the nine member Conservation Authorities comprising CAMC compiled detailed data on four measures of environmental health: forest conditions, surface water quality, groundwater quality and aquatic habitat. This information is summarized in the Report Card and supported by detailed maps of the ORM showing the full range of results on a subwatershed basis, such as:

- Large amounts of forest cover in critical areas of the ORM are being maintained. However, few large patches of undisturbed forest exist outside the Core Areas, and long stretches of stream bank lack sufficient forest cover. In addition, good data on "forest quality," such as the extent of invasive species, is lacking.
- Groundwater quality is considered generally good across the study area, although chloride levels in some shallow wells along roadsides and in urban areas is trending upward. Ongoing groundwater quality monitoring is needed.
- Coldwater fish communities and coldwater temperatures are evenly distributed across the ORM and adjacent Greenbelt lands, representing good quality aquatic habitat. While some sites represent marginal habitats, land use mitigation and restoration efforts may prevent future deterioration.
- Surface water quality in almost half of the subwatersheds assessed was assigned grades of "fair," "poor" or "very poor." Those subwatersheds with higher scores had greater forest and streambank cover and were located in more protected areas. Again, there was a lack of data for some areas.

Report Card recommends further restoration action

Additional restoration and enhancement work, supported by robust enforcement, new administrative tools and secure long-term funding, is essential to preserving and building on the progress made to date. The Report Card recommends a number of stewardship activities that the province, Conservation Authorities, municipalities, environmental groups and local farmers, business and residents should undertake. Based on

the detailed scientific data in the Report Card, together with the watershed plans developed by individual Conservation Authorities, CAMC and its partners can target where this restoration work should be done to be most effective and get the ‘biggest bang for the buck.’

- Strategic planting of trees, shrubs and other native vegetation is needed to expand and connect forest patches and other habitats, control invasive species, and protect coldwater streams.
- Marginal farmlands and areas along the banks of rivers and streams should be re-naturalized to improve water quality and moderate stream flows.
- All new development, site alteration and infrastructure projects on the ORM should meet strict standards to control erosion, ensure the use of uncontaminated fill and minimize the release of sediment into streams. In addition, tree cutting and fill by-laws should be vigorously enforced.
- Municipalities and/or provincial agencies should implement Source Protection Plan policies as soon as possible to better manage road salt, commercial fertilizers and livestock manure.
- Stable funding to encourage greater uptake of Environmental Farm Plans and private land stewardship initiatives would reduce environmental pressures and help achieve restoration objectives.
- Ongoing monitoring of environmental conditions should be expanded in order to fill gaps in the data, reveal developing problems, and gauge whether restoration activities have been successful.

ORM provides invaluable environmental services

The ORM and Greenbelt lands provide essential ecosystem services that the residents of south central Ontario rely on every day. Forested areas reduce soil erosion, clean the air, moderate temperature, and provide wildlife habitat. Wetlands and other greenspaces absorb rain and snow, replenish drinking water aquifers, regulate stream flow, protect aquatic habitat, and prevent downstream flooding. Farmlands provide healthy foods and economic value to local communities, while the scenic natural landscape offers numerous recreational opportunities. The continued protection and enhancement of these lands, and their links to local natural heritage systems in the urban landscape, is also a key strategy for climate change mitigation and resilience for all lands included within the provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The provincial protection plans for the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt have provided a solid foundation to limit urban sprawl and maintain the health of these environmentally important lands. The results and recommendations of this Report Card can help achieve the Plans’ additional goals to improve and restore environmental conditions within the ORM and Greenbelt lands.

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The CAMC is a coalition of nine Conservation Authorities that manage the watersheds covering the ORM. Formed in 2000, the CAMC collaborates with numerous groups and individuals to: take action for the protection and restoration of the ORM; provide expert advice on environmental planning and policies; undertake science-based research; and provide opportunities for recreation. A full copy of the Report Card and links to the CAMC members is available on-line at www.morainecoalition.ca
