

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Frontenac County has a unique rural context with a vast, majestic natural heritage system throughout its four municipalities - North Frontenac; Central Frontenac; South Frontenac; and the Frontenac Islands. The way the County plans, develops, and grows over the long-term will impact the health and vitality of its natural heritage system. A regional, collaborative planning approach that uses a long-term community visioning process is necessary to protect and restore the County's natural environment for future generations.

Ten years have passed since the County last evaluated its natural heritage features in its 2012 *Natural Heritage Study*. Today, the region faces new challenges due to several driving forces, including development pressures, biodiversity loss, and the impacts of climate change. Unless addressed, these forces may jeopardize the future of the County's environmental assets. Therefore, contemporary challenges present the County with an opportunity to safeguard its natural heritage by embracing a long-term (50- to-100 years) planning framework for environmental protection that goes above and beyond the minimum requirements of conventional planning.

The following regional natural heritage planning framework provides strategic principles, objectives, and implementation tools for the County of

Frontenac. The research that informed this framework was conducted using qualitative methods, including a literature review of over 100 hundred academic articles, 19 case study analyses, exploratory conversations with 12 experts in the field, policy analysis, and site observations. The natural heritage planning best practices and innovative techniques that this research revealed supported and inspired the long-term planning framework proposed in this report. Furthermore, the framework is based on the precautionary principle, a proactive and careful approach to environmental protection at the landscape scale.

The framework proposes six principles:

1. Enhance legal protection
2. Plan with Indigenous Peoples
3. Protect critical ecosystems
4. Build on opportunities for stewardship
5. Connect people to the landscape
6. Invest in models

Six recommendations and 47 action items explain how the framework's principles could be implemented in the County's next natural heritage study and over the short-, medium-, and long-term. The proposed framework aims to assist land use planning and growth management in the County by identifying ways to satisfy the region's environmental, social, and economic needs while protecting the critical natural heritage system before it is fragmented, damaged, or lost forever.

