

## **Executive Summary**

Natural heritage protection and proper lake planning is of great importance for the County of Peterborough and the province of Ontario. From significant wetlands to significant habitat of endangered and threatened species, natural heritage features provide important environmental and social values, as they are a legacy of the natural landscape (NHRM, 2010). Much of these resources found across southern and eastern Ontario have been lost, which makes the protection of the natural heritage features in the County of Peterborough even more imperative.

An important way to protect the natural environment from incompatible uses and development is through Official Plan (OP) policy and zoning. OPs set out the broad goals, objectives and policies of a municipality, and outlines in schedules each land use designation found within the political boundaries; such as open space, residential, industrial etc. An OPs authority is detailed in the Planning Act. A planning authority also develops a zoning by-law to accompany the OP. A zoning by-law is a legal document that also receives its power under the Planning Act. A zoning by-law accurately breaks down what type of land uses are permitted and how future development will proceed. These two documents work together to guide future growth and are able to protect natural features if desired, especially in lake regions.

The County of Peterborough OP review will be taking place in the summer of 2013. The purpose of this report is to provide a list of recommended best practices for natural heritage and lake planning to the County of Peterborough to consider during the OP review process. The objectives of this research project are:

1. To develop an inventory of initiatives other municipalities are implementing to protect natural heritage features and lakes.

2. Provide the County of Peterborough a tailored list of possible short term and long term recommendations regarding natural heritage planning and lake planning to consider during the OP review process.

*Methods:*

Four research methods were used in this report. These methods were used to gather as much relevant information as possible on the District of Muskoka and the lower tier municipalities of Gravenhurst and Bracebridge, the City of Kawartha Lakes, Parks Canada and the local municipalities of North Grenville and Rideau Lakes, the Region of Waterloo and the lower tier municipality of Cambridge, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP). First, a literature review of existing materials was conducted, focusing on basic concepts of natural heritage systems, provincial policy and academic literature on natural heritage planning and lake planning. Second, a comprehensive examination of all case study location OPs or OP equivalents was performed (such as the ORMCP and the Rideau Canal National Historic Site Management Plan). This document review focused on locating possible best practice initiatives moving forward. The documents were examined for any policy and general information on natural heritage system and lake planning issues. Next, interviews were conducted with the municipalities listed. Twenty-four questions regarding environmental protection policies, implementation and, the use of science were answered by participants. Finally, two information sharing sessions were held to discuss findings and to present the results. The sessions allowed for clear dialogue between stakeholders.

*Results:*

Overall, the County of Peterborough is doing well with regards to protecting natural heritage features and its area lakes according to current OP policy. With that said, document

analysis and interviews revealed that there are many interesting options to consider when updating the OP in 2013. One gap in the County of Peterborough OP relates to shoreline protection. Addressing shoreline development will be a challenge, but information collected from case study locations offers interesting techniques to mitigate impacts. Also, many issues fall within the jurisdiction of the province. Aggregate extraction, fish and wildlife habitat, provincially significant wetlands and species at risk are all protected by provincial and sometime federal legislation. The County can look for ways to strengthen these policies at the local level if political will exists, but for the most part, most municipalities are following the guidelines presented to them. The work the County is doing with fellow stakeholders is encouraging and seems to be the norm across most case study locations. Below is a summary of the short term, long term and supporting recommendations proposed based on the strengths and weaknesses of the current County of Peterborough OP.

*Recommendations:*

Short Term

1. Restrict boathouse height to one storey. Do not allow boathouses to be used for human habitation.
2. Develop a “sliding scale” development policy for all new developments wishing to build along the shoreline. The closer to the water, the smaller the structure and vice versa.
3. Create a policy that restricts resource extraction within at least 200m of all water bodies. Consider developing a policy that requires a 20m shoreline buffer between the high water mark and development. The 20m buffer shall be in 75% of its natural state.
4. Protect all wetlands by giving every known wetland locally significant status if it does not already have it.

5. Encourage area municipalities to develop a septic re-inspection program. This could be funded through an annual property tax.

#### Long Term

6. Write a Peterborough Cultural Heritage Study and County of Peterborough Significant Landscape Heritage Study.
7. Establish all waterfront sites as site plan control areas.
8. Implement the findings of *The Kawarthas, Naturally Connected* project now being conducted. This project is identifying natural heritage features across the County of Peterborough and City of Kawartha Lakes.

#### Supporting

9. Fund and develop a County of Peterborough Water Strategy, similar to the one used by the District of Muskoka.
10. Work to develop a County of Peterborough EAC to work with lower-tier EACs and the County.