

DATE: August 30, 2017

REPORT TITLE: **PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM FOR THE GROWTH PLAN AND DRAFT AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM MAPPING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES FOR THE GROWTH PLAN AND GREENBELT PLAN**

FROM: Lorraine Graham-Watson, Commissioner of Corporate Services

## RECOMMENDATION

**That the comments on the Proposed Regional Natural Heritage System and Draft Agricultural System Mapping and Implementation Procedures contained in the report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services titled “Proposed Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan and Draft Agricultural System Mapping and Implementation Procedures for the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan” be endorsed;**

**And further, that a copy of the subject report be sent to the Town of Caledon, the City of Brampton, the City of Mississauga, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, the Halton Region Conservation Authority, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.**

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Province has released to the Environmental Registry its ‘Proposed Criteria, Methods and Mapping for the Regional Natural Heritage System (NHS)’ and ‘Draft Agricultural System Mapping and Implementation Procedures’ for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Comments are due by October 4, 2017.
- The proposed Provincial NHS and Agricultural System are outcomes of new policies in the amended Provincial Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan.
- Within the Region of Peel, the:
  - NHS mapping identifies four small areas of new NHS in the Town of Caledon;
  - Agricultural System land base mapping identifies Provincial recommended Prime Agricultural Areas and Rural Lands; and,
  - Agricultural System agri-food network identifies the economic assets that support the food and farming industry.
- The detailed response to the Province is attached as Appendix I and Appendix II.

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### DISCUSSION

#### 1. Background

On May 18, 2017, the Province concluded the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review by releasing final versions of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan (the Plans).

During consultation, the Province indicated it would lead the development of policies and mapping for a Natural Heritage System (NHS) and Agricultural System for the Growth Plan and provide implementation direction to municipalities. Corresponding policies for the NHS and Agricultural System setting out conformity requirements for municipal official plans are included in the Plans. The Growth Plan requires that municipal official plans incorporate the NHS as an overlay, designate prime agricultural areas as mapped by the Province and identify the Agricultural System in conformity with provincial policy.

On July 6, 2017, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) posted the Proposed Criteria, Methods and Mapping for the Regional Natural Heritage System (MNRF) and Draft Agricultural System Mapping and Implementation Procedures (OMAFRA) on the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) Environmental Registry for a 90 day public review and comment period. Comments on the proposals are requested by October 4, 2017.

The following provides a summary of the proposals and recommended response comments to be endorsed by Regional Council in response to the Provincial consultations.

#### 2. Proposed Regional Natural Heritage System (NHS) for the Growth Plan

##### a) Overview of NHS Criteria, Methods and Mapping

The “Proposed Regional Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan – Summary of Criteria and Methods” released by MNRF identifies the principles, criteria and methods used to develop the draft NHS map for the Growth Plan. In accordance with the Growth Plan policies, the new NHS overlay is only to be identified in areas not covered by the existing Greenbelt Plans and outside settlement areas.

The mapping criteria and methods were selected to identify a system at a regional landscape scale for the GGH and are not intended to identify or connect all natural areas and features that may be important at a smaller regional or local scale.

Key principles have guided the mapping to ensure criteria and methods are transparent and science based. GIS mapping tools were used to ensure large core areas of natural heritage features were included and connected in a system with regional scale linkages (e.g., 500 metres wide).

Three categories of criteria are being proposed to map the Regional NHS:

- Core Areas (natural cover composition, size (> 100 ha.), intersection with public lands);
- Linkages (composition, connectivity, length, width > 500 m); and,

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- Additional Natural Features (to include woodlands and wetlands overlapping with but extending outside Greenbelt boundaries).

The methods proposed by MNRF are complementary and consistent with methods used to designate the NHS in the Greenbelt Plan.

### **b) Analysis of Growth Plan NHS Mapping in Peel**

Within the GGH, most of the proposed new Growth Plan NHS is located in outer ring municipalities. Within the Region of Peel, the NHS mapping identifies four small areas of new NHS in the Town of Caledon.

New NHS areas in Peel have been identified on the basis that they will include overlapping woodland and wetland features to ensure that features located both within and partly outside of Greenbelt NHS designations are included. There is also a proposed new NHS linkage in the vicinity of Mayfield West connecting the West Humber and Etobicoke Creek watersheds.

Mapping showing the location of the proposed new NHS areas and detailed comments on each of the areas proposed in Peel are provided in the EBR response letter attached as Appendix I.

Although there are very few areas of new NHS proposed in Peel, the proposed designations at Mayfield West have implications for future settlement area planning for that area.

### **c) Summary of Response Comments**

A response letter to the MNRF providing detailed comments on the proposed NHS criteria and mapping is attached as Appendix I for consideration and endorsement by Council. Highlights of the response comments are provided below.

Regional staff generally supports the need for a hierarchy of NHS planning at different provincial, regional and local scales and understand the importance of including regional NHS planning within the four provincial land use plans.

Although Regional staff has no significant objection to the regional scale criteria proposed by the Province, the application of the criteria in Peel results in the identification of four small NHS areas, which provide relatively little added policy value given the current framework of local, regional and provincial NHS planning requirements in Peel. The addition of another natural heritage policy layer to implement and administer adds further complexity to the already complicated framework of provincial policies that apply to the Region.

The new Growth Plan NHS areas in Peel should be reviewed to ensure they are identified based on the consistent application of regional scale criteria or be deleted entirely given their limited coverage and overlap with local scale NHS planning.

The implementation of the Growth Plan NHS boundaries should permit appropriate refinement of boundaries by municipalities in consultation with the Province.

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### 3. Proposed Provincial Agricultural System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

#### a) Overview of the Proposed Provincial Agricultural System and Implementation Procedures

The agricultural policies in the provincial land use plans have been updated to be more consistent across each of the Plans and with the new permitted uses identified in the Provincial Policy Statement. The Plans include policies that guide the protection of a Provincial Agricultural System for the GGH and enhancement of the economic viability of the sector.

The Province has identified two components that make up the Agricultural System for the GGH:

- the land base comprised of Prime Agricultural Areas (PAAs) and Rural Lands; and,
- the agri-food network of business and services that supports the agri-food sector.

The proposed “Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe” released by OMAFRA identifies principles, criteria and methods that the Province used to identify the draft Provincial Agricultural System and direct how municipalities are to designate and map the PAA. The corresponding Provincial mapping of the agricultural land base and agri-food network are also posted for consultation.

#### b) Analysis of the Proposed Provincial Agricultural System in Peel

##### i. Proposed Provincial Agricultural Land Base

Municipalities will be required to refine and then designate provincial prime agricultural areas and rural lands in municipal official plans. A Provincial Land Evaluation & Area Review (LEAR) was undertaken to identify recommended boundaries for the provincial PAA. Through its LEAR, the Province also identified candidate rural lands for inclusion in the agricultural land base. These are lands that municipalities have the option to designate as prime agricultural land or rural land with supportive policies for agricultural, agricultural-related, and on -farm diversified uses.

Municipalities may refine the mapped Provincial Agricultural Land Base based on the proposed Implementation Procedures and a technical method approved by the Province. As such, the Provincial Agricultural Land Base map is interim until all municipal refinements and conformity has occurred.

As part of the Peel 2041: Regional Official Plan Review (Peel 2041), the Region, jointly with the Town of Caledon, completed a more refined and locally specific LEAR Study to identify the Region’s PAA. The proposed Provincial mapping indicates more PAA than in both the current Regional Official Plan and as recommended through the Peel-Caledon LEAR study. The Province’s mapping also includes lands that have received planning approvals for non-farm land uses that would not be appropriate to designate in an agricultural land designation category (see Appendix II). The Province has anticipated that refinements will be needed and has built this into the

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process to finalize initial mapping later this year and then through the official plan conformity processes that will follow.

### ii. Proposed Provincial Agri-Food Network

The agri-food network policies in the Provincial Plans encourage municipalities to plan for and protect the economic viability of the agri-food sector. The proposed Implementation Procedures provide options that municipalities can consider to support and grow the sector. For example, the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group, Grown in Peel program and the Region's partnership with the Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance directly or indirectly support the broader agri-food sector.

### iii. Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA)

To assess, avoid and mitigate impacts to the Agricultural System, the Provincial Plan policies require Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIA) to be undertaken as part of a Municipal Comprehensive Review for a settlement boundary expansion or for site-specific planning applications for non-farm uses within the Agricultural System. The Province is developing guidance material for the completion of these AIAs, which are anticipated to be posted on the Environmental Registry in fall 2017.

## c) Summary of Response Comments

A response letter to OMAFRA providing detailed comments on the proposed Provincial Agricultural System and its Implementation Procedures is attached as Appendix II for consideration by Council. Highlights of the response comments are provided below.

### i. Refining Provincial Agricultural Land Base Mapping Using Local LEAR Study

Peel Region has an established agricultural sector that is part of a larger agricultural system in the GGH. However, there are local differences across each of the GGH agricultural communities. The proposed Provincial Implementation Procedures should be clarified to permit greater flexibility for municipalities to identify land use designations for the agricultural land base, based on local influencing factors and provide clear support for use of local LEAR studies to refine the Provincial Agricultural Land Base mapping in municipal conformity exercises. The Implementing Guidelines should provide greater weight and consideration to local LEAR studies provided they have followed provincial guidelines.

### ii. Recognizing Prior Approved Non-Farm Designations

As the proposed Provincial Agricultural Land Base map is broad scale and not refined, it inadvertently extends into existing non-agricultural designations that may not be appropriate candidates for a PAA or Rural Land designations (e.g., the Palgrave Estates Residential Community). The mapping should be corrected or the proposed Implementation Procedures should recognize that the draft mapping contains inaccuracies with an expectation that these would be corrected during the municipal conformity process.

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**iii. Flexibility to Work with Adjoining Municipalities to Resolve Boundary Mapping Issues**

As the Provincial Agricultural Land Base crosses municipal jurisdictions, Regional staff supports Provincial direction to work with adjoining municipalities to refine and align agricultural land use designations at municipal borders. Municipalities should be provided corresponding flexibility when aligning designations that abut municipal boundaries as each municipality may have different land designation preferences.

**CONCLUSION**

The Province will be proceeding to finalize mapping and implementation procedures for both the NHS and Agricultural System. The guidance and mapping is anticipated to be finalized and released by the end of 2017.

Conformity to this Provincial mapping is being incorporated into the Peel 2041 work plan as components of the Greenlands System and Agriculture Policy Review. Regional staff will continue to work with the Local Municipalities, the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group, stakeholders and the public throughout the refinement and conformity process.



Lorraine Graham-Watson, Commissioner of Corporate Services

**Approved for Submission:**



J. Sheehy for D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

**APPENDICES**

Appendix I - Draft Response Comments on the “Proposed Criteria, Methods and Mapping for the Regional Natural Heritage System” (EBR # 013 – 1014)

Appendix II - Draft Response Comments on the “Draft Agricultural System Mapping and Implementation Procedures” (EBR # 013-0968)

*For further information regarding this report, please contact Arvin Prasad, Director, Integrated Planning Division, extension 4251, Arvin.Prasad@peelregion.ca.*

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