

The Oak Ridges Moraine: A Snapshot in Time

1. Orangeville: Elastic Urban Boundary

Orangeville sits at the headwaters of the Credit, Grand and Nottawasaga Rivers. At a current population of 24,000 and with plans to roughly double this by 2021, Orangeville has a low density residential and commercial growth pattern. The City has plans to annex lands from neighbouring rural municipalities to meet its need for growth areas. Water and sewage servicing is nearing capacity for any additional growth. Commuter traffic congestion is a major issue.

2. Ballycroy: Thirsty Golf Course Playground on Humber Headwaters

Approval for a 27-hole golf course and hotel resort operation has been given by the Town of Adjala-Tosoronto despite inadequate groundwater supplies to meet water needs. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has approved plans for 25% of the water supply to come directly from Humber River storm flows. Newly formed Friends of the Oak Ridges Moraine in Ballycroy has filed an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board.



3. Caledon East: An All-too Typical Moraine Story

Situated on highly permeable recharge lands in the headwaters of the Main Humber, Caledon East has a history of well contamination (agricultural run-off and potential failing septic systems). As a solution, the village was hooked up by the Big Sewer Pipe to Lake Ontario treatment plants. However, its water supply is from underground aquifers. This exportation of water out of the local system could lead to water budget deficits unless strict monitoring is put in place and growth is managed in the future.

4. Bolton: Unsustainable Growth Brings Big Pipe Pressures

For 20 years, Bolton has been mining its deep aquifer as growth has outstripped the capacity of these aquifers to provide sustainable water supplies. In the spring of 2001, Bolton will be hooked up to Lake Ontario water. The next challenge will be how to stop the northward sprawl of Bolton onto the Oak Ridges Moraine now that water supply is no longer a constraint.



5. King Township: New Council Says No To Urban Sprawl

The new King Township Council is giving itself time to review servicing alternatives to the York Durham Sewage System (YDSS). This seems prudent in light of the upcoming (spring 2001) Divisional Court appeal of the Ontario Municipal Board decision. The Board had ruled in favour of King City's Community Plan (OPA 54) which projected a population that could economically sustain the extension of the YDSS. An overturn by the Court of any part of this decision could affect servicing requirements of King City.

In the path of the proposed Big Pipe to King City lies the Orfus proposal for a 2,500 person retirement community and golf course. The project is currently on hold and is monitored by Concerned Citizens of King Township.

6. Snowball: ClubLink Tees Off

Club Link King Valley Golf Course is planning a residential development just north of Snowball. The first phase is underway (expansion of head office to 40,000 ft²) with plans for 60 units. This development set a precedent when it triggered a Regional Official Plan Amendment that allows Resort/ Recreational uses across the whole region.

7. Vaughan: Aggressive Urban Plans

The Maple Spur, where headwater streams for the Don River abound, is the site of the infamous Keele Valley Landfill. Vaughan C.A.R.E.S., a long-standing local group, has been successful in forcing a 2002 closure but remains vigilant. As well as the dump, the southern portion of the Maple Spur is covered by Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 400. In September, Vaughan Council approved OPA 600 which accelerates the urbanization of lands due east of the dump. The last chance for public intervention is at Region of York Planning Committee in March 2001.

The Yonge Street Blues: Where Fiction Becomes Reality

8. Richmond Hill: Planning by the Board

The Richmond Hill Ontario Municipal Board hearing, where developers want to add an additional 17,000 people on sensitive Moraine lands, has been in session since May 2000. At stake are dozens of critically important natural features including two kettle lakes, (Phillips and Bond), kettle wetlands and sensitive groundwater recharge and discharge areas. These housing projects, if approved, will create the first-ever break in the natural corridor of the 160-kilometre long Moraine.

9. Lake Wilcox: A Lake on Life Support

In 1997 two lake lungs were installed on Lake Wilcox as part of a remediation plan to pump life back into the dying lake. Decades of human habitation has caused high levels of phosphates to accumulate in the lake bottom sediments ultimately robbing the lake of oxygen. Weekly water quality monitoring has been on-going, however the numbers are not yet available. Lake Wilcox is surrounded by the rapidly-growing community of Oak Ridges which has a build-out population of 32,000 – four times that of 1995.

10. Aurora: Ducks?... Limited

An application for an Official Plan Amendment for lands surrounding the White Rose/ Preston Lake Wetland Complex north of Bloomington Road and west of Highway 404 has been brought forward by Lebovic Enterprises. The development proposal is for 75 detached residential condominiums and an 18-hole golf course along with club house and maintenance buildings.

Another wetland, the MacKenzie Marsh, has virtually been destroyed by inappropriate buffering and residential development. Wildlife studies taken in the summer of 2000 compared to a study fifteen years ago show a marked decline in bird species.

11. Queensville: Population Explosion

And then there's Queensville, a small hamlet of 700 people located just north of the Moraine and surrounded by some of Canada's finest agricultural land, which is slated to grow to a mature population of 30,000 people and the site of a private university. A Class Environmental Assessment recommends that the York Durham Sewage System be extended from Newmarket to service the new city. Located within the Lake Simcoe Basin from which it derives its water supply, sending waste water to Lake Ontario would constitute an inter-basin transfer and potential water budget deficits.

Photos:
Butterfly: S. Russel, Deer: J. Kamstra, Leopard Frog: J. Kamstra, Hockley Valley: MTRCA

Whitchurch-Stouffville: A Municipality in the Throes of Change

12. Vandorf: A Community with Water Woes

It's a fact that the summer of 1999 was a dry one – water shortages occurred all across Ontario. But water shortages on the Oak Ridges Moraine? Historic accounts describe the Moraine as "the place where springs and water abound!" And yet in the summer of '99, an estimated 50 private water wells (some as deep as 150 feet) in Vandorf and surrounding countryside "sucked sand" resulting in many new drilled wells. On top of this, e-coli and coliform bacteria were detected in a number of wells.

13. Gormley: A Hamlet in the Shadow of ClubLink

The historic community of Gormley, at the crossroads of Woodbine Avenue and Stouffville Road, has an approved Community Plan (OPA 88). Well to the northeast of Gormley's downtown, ClubLink is proposing a 2,500 person residential development, golf course and a Tennis Canada facility on private communal services. Inexplicably, the municipality has agreed that this proposal fits into the Gormley Secondary Plan Study Area, despite the geographical separation between the two.

14. Musselman's Lake: Planning By the Big Pipe

More proof of the realities of urban sprawl and planning by the big pipe can be found at Musselman's Lake. There are large parcels of land around this small kettle lake that have been assessed for estate and standard residential development. Developers, however, are waiting in the wings for hook up to the York Durham Sewer System.

15. Ballantrae: Playground in the Country

The number of homes in this small town is set to roughly double in the next five years. The Ballantrae Golf and Country Club is now under construction, with plans to accommodate an additional 1,500 – 1,800 people on communal services. Stage 1 (250 homes, including 16-20 estate residential lots and a golf course) is underway with partial occupancy.

16. Stouffville: Planning by the Big Pipe

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Region of York have plans to extend the York Durham Sewage System to Stouffville by 2002. This could lead to a doubling of the town's population by 2011.

Uxbridge: Small town, or sprawl-town Ontario?

17. Gan Eden and Coppins Corners:

The small town of Uxbridge is fighting two major development proposals. The first is on the Gan Eden lands, where there had been a proposal for 2,500 housing. Over two years, there have been five OMB pre-hearings, and the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of the public's dollars to defend its Official Plan. Then the original developer sold the land to another developer, controlled by Mario Cortellucci. An aggressive development thrust is expected.

The second development fight is at Coppins Corners, just 2 kilometres from Gan Eden, where Sandhill Aggregates wants to build 500+ houses and a golf course. The key issue here will be the proposed use of communal sewage servicing, which is currently prohibited by Durham Region. A prolonged OMB hearing is expected, with active opposition from the Region, the Township and community groups.

18. Goodwood: The Town That Does Matter

Goodwood Matters! - a local community group - has been successful in getting Uxbridge Council to take a bigger view of local planning. The Goodwood Secondary Plan will be revisited with more community input, broader principles and assessing cumulative impacts of all developments. There are currently 124 homes in Goodwood and four proposed housing development proposals that would double the population of the hamlet.

19. Oshawa, Clarington and Scugog: Paper Sludge Woes

Local resident group, Protect the Ridges is concerned about the dumping and stockpiling of very large quantities of paper sludge on several sites on the headwaters of Bowmanville Creek in Oshawa and Clarington. The sludge contains heavy metals, chemicals and other contaminants. The dumping and stockpiling of paper sludge on the Moraine is in contravention of the Regional Plan and municipal by-laws.

20. Haldimand Township: Taking Water by the Bottle

Currently, the Provincial Ministry of the Environment has granted permits to two water bottling companies within a few kilometers of each other. Mont Clair and Spring Valley will have between them, permits to take close to 500 million litres of water per year from the ground. With no monitoring of water takers and so little known about the physical characteristics of the aquifer, local residents are asking questions about the renewability of the aquifer and the sustainability of the current rate of extraction. Both bottlers distribute in Ontario and export their products internationally.

21. Hamilton Township: Angst Over Aggregates

Hamilton Township Ratepayer's Association is concerned with the impacts of gravel pit operations in the area. Fifty trucks a day haul gravel from three pits on the Hamilton-Haldimand border near the town of Harwood on Rice Lake. The widening of Highway 401 between Port Hope and Cobourg is expected to create new contracts for local gravel pits.

22. Don River: Still Degraded

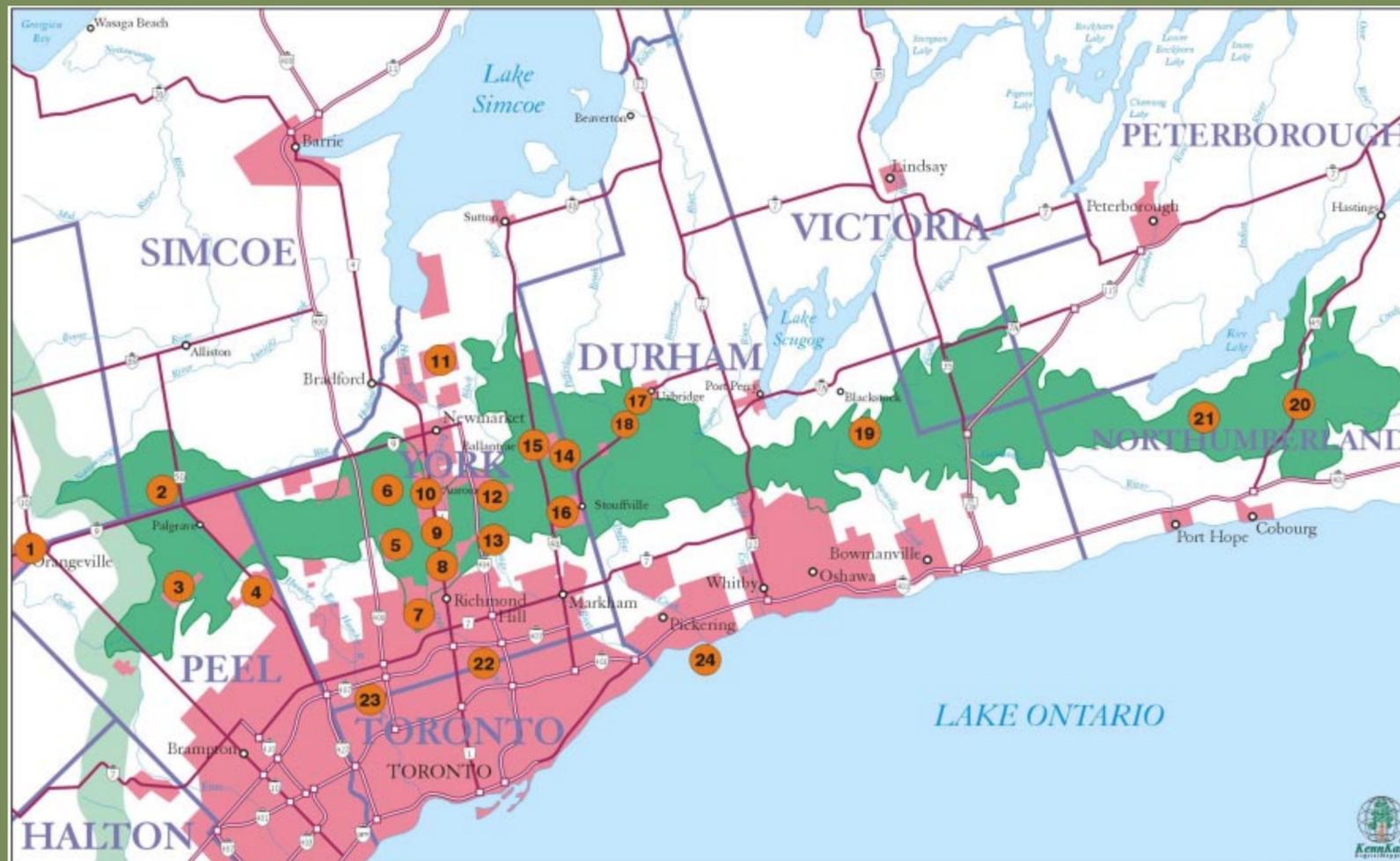
The recently-released Don Watershed Report Card cites several problems with the health of the Don. Flow volumes have increased and storm waters continue to be discharged into the watercourse, with only piecemeal attempts at source control. The report also points to poor water quality, and no appreciable policy changes to protect natural areas. The report card notes that "protection of the Moraine – its features, functions and linkages – is important to the water quality, biodiversity and baseflow of the Don."

23. Humber River: Fair Grade

The Humber Watershed Alliance recently released a report card on the health of the Humber River. Various poor grades were assigned including a D in water quality, a C in groundwater quantity, a C in river flow and an F in stormwater management. The watershed also received a C in forest cover, an E in wetlands, and a C in wildlife. Also significant was the C grade in protection of significant landforms.

24. York Durham Long Term Water Supply: A Solution for Whom?

York Region, in partnership with Consumers Utilities, is working on a long term water supply for York's projected population of ~ 2 million people by 2031. The projected demand is 210 million imperial gallons per day. There are several disturbing aspects: the projected population itself; the cost and long term sprawl implications of bringing Lake Ontario water to communities high on the Moraine; the opaqueness of the public consultation process and dismal access to information; and the move towards a privatization of the water supply and distribution systems.



The Oak Ridges Moraine: Rain Barrel of South Central Ontario



The Oak Ridges Moraine is unique to southern Ontario – 160 kilometres long, on average 13 kilometres wide and hundreds of metres deep. It stands out as one of the most distinct landscapes and one of the most significant natural features of Ontario. Its height above the flat lands to north and south, its rolling hills and river and stream valleys and large blocks of mixed forest provide solace and a sense of connection to the people who live, work and play on the Moraine, natural and wild habitat for flora and fauna and untapped recreational opportunities. However, its most precious feature lies hidden below the ground surface.

The Moraine has been described as southern Ontario's rain barrel – its permeable sands and gravels absorb precipitation, which is delivered to the deep aquifers. They, in turn, collect, store, filter and release water to over 65 watercourses flowing north and south into Georgian Bay, Lakes Simcoe, Scugog, Rice and Ontario. It may be surprising to know that over a quarter of a million people depend on the Moraine for their drinking water through private and municipal wells.

