



## Media Release

### **Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act celebrates ten year milestone but tough road still ahead**

(KING CITY, ON, Dec.15, 2011) The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (the Act), passed December 14, 2001, was enacted to control the aggressive urban sprawl of the mid-to-late eighties that threatened the fragile hydrogeology, geomorphology and ecology of the Oak Ridges Moraine – a source of drinking water for millions of people.

The Act was passed after more than a decade of advocacy and support by grassroots organizations and key politicians. It became a multi-stakeholder conservation movement crossing political boundaries and ultimately received unanimous all party support– a monumental achievement which today can still be celebrated by stakeholders and citizens. The Act represented one of the earliest “environment-first” policy frameworks for Ontario and provided a strong precedent for Ontario’s Greenbelt Plan (the Plan).

Earlier this year, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (the Foundation) set out to determine whether the Act and Plan were doing what they were intended to do. Eight reports under the title “Measuring Success on the Oak Ridges Moraine” have revealed the Moraine is holding its own in terms of its environmental health. As well, when it comes to adoption and acceptance of the Plan by government, residents, businesses and other stakeholders, the results are generally good. But there were also deficiencies that raise serious concern.

Only one-third of all streams on the Moraine are functioning as healthy, natural ecosystems. Rare prairie grassland and savannah habitats are under constant threat as is habitat for interior forest species and species-at-risk. There are serious legislative gaps and deficiencies that are allowing detrimental activities to continue. These include the importation of contaminated fill (from off the Moraine into areas of high aquifer vulnerability on the Moraine), the taking of water from Moraine aquifers for developments off the Moraine and the continued building of roads, pipes and utility lines.

While some gaps and deficiencies were expected, the Foundation felt so strong about some weaknesses in the Plan that it submitted an application in September 2011 to request that the legislation be reviewed in advance of its scheduled review in 2015. Sadly, the Province declined the Foundation’s request.

Notwithstanding this decision, “There is still much to celebrate”, says Kim Gavine, Executive Director with the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. “We have a plan that recognizes the Moraine as a critical landscape for protecting drinking water, we have engaged stakeholders and we have the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation who, with new provincial funding, will help the Province meet its goals and objectives under the Act. Unfortunately, without further funding, the Foundation will close its doors in 2012 and the programs it has spearheaded and funded will cease.”

Considerable progress has been made since 2001, but there’s a great deal more to do – both on the land (restoring vegetation, improving water quality, protecting critical habitat) and in provincial and municipal offices charged with properly implementing the Act.

We need to ensure that the Oak Ridges Moraine’s value to Ontarians remains secure.

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*The **Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (ORMF)** is a non-profit organization mandated to preserve, protect and restore the ecological and hydrological health of the Oak Ridges Moraine (Moraine). Although the ORMF's granting role is currently suspended, we still have a pivotal role to play if the Moraine is to remain protected in the future.*

*The ORMF has developed the expertise and network necessary to achieve the task at hand and has requested continued funding from the Province. Since 2002, the ORMF has allocated more than \$14.1 million and leveraged more than \$35.8 million to 177 projects in support of stewardship, education, research, trail and land securement projects. With further investment by the Province, the ORMF can build on its success by addressing the challenges with renewed vigour, in order that the Moraine's value to Ontarians remains secure.*